

Division 59: Communities, \$99 021 000 —

Ms A.R. Mitchell, Chairman.

Mr J.H.D. Day, Minister for Planning representing the Minister for Community Services.

Ms J. Perkins, Director General.

Ms D. Clements, Acting Executive Director, Children and Family Services.

Dr K. MacArthur, Executive Director, Community Engagement.

Mrs E. Delany, Acting Executive Director, Corporate and Business Services.

Ms M.A. Dawkins, Executive Director, Policy and Planning.

Mr C. Johnson, Chief Financial Officer.

[Witnesses introduced.]

[4.40 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: The first question goes to the member for Girrawheen.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the third dot point on page 713, which refers to the seniors strategic framework. Where is it?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Does the member want to know the status of the framework?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: It is referred to, but far as I am aware it has not been written or finalised.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I am advised that the framework will be launched in the second half of this year. It will build upon earlier strategies and is responsive to the needs of Western Australian seniors as identified through the age-friendly communities consultation process. It identifies areas of focus at all levels of the community, including infrastructure, essential services, community planning, engagement of seniors, and protection and safety net issues. The latter aspect includes the cost of living and safety and security rebates, which benefit all Seniors Card holders. I reiterate that it is due to be launched in the second half of 2012.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: How many officers within the department are working on it; and, how many full-time equivalents within the department are generally devoted to working on seniors' issues?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: It is not possible to break down precisely the number of FTEs working within particular areas within the department, because a number of officers cover a range of policy areas. I will ask the director general to provide some general information.

Ms J. Perkins: We have 60 FTEs under the community —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: How many are working on seniors' issues?

Ms J. Perkins: I cannot provide a precise figure for any one point in time because the functions are distributed across the department.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: How many are working on the strategic framework?

Ms J. Perkins: There are 23 FTEs involved out of those 60 FTEs who undertake a range of projects in the seniors area. That is looking at incorporating all the functions across the department.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I will repeat my question: how many people are working on the seniors strategic framework—that one document?

Ms J. Perkins: I am informed that two staff are intimately involved in that particular exercise, who in the past six months have been involved in consultations across a range of stakeholders.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Will the framework include any strategies for dementia sufferers or will it be limited to the subjects just mentioned?

Ms J. Perkins: I will ask Ms Dawkins to answer that question because she is intimately involved with that.

Ms M.A. Dawkins: As the name implies it is a strategic framework, so it covers pillars of strategy that the government as a whole will use to guide its work in the years ahead. One of the areas will be a health and wellbeing stream without doubt, and certainly our consultations have indicated that the increase in dementia is of concern in the years ahead. We are releasing seniors wellbeing indicators very shortly. The minister has just approved them. Certainly the data updating our previous indicator set indicates that those sorts of issues continue to increase.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I wish to compare page 711 of the 2012–13 budget paper No 2 with page 730 of the 2011-12 budget paper No 2. In last year's budget papers, the estimated appropriation for the delivery of services in 2011-12 was \$97 million; but in this year's budget papers the estimated actual appropriation for 2011–12 has increased to \$130 million. The note at paragraph (a) on page 711 stated that the 2011-12 budget figures were adjusted because of the social enterprise fund. In those budget papers the appropriation increased from \$97 million to \$107 million, but then \$130 million was spent, which is an extra \$32 million. How much went towards the social enterprise fund? Was it the \$10 million that was in those papers? What did the department spend that \$130 million on, which was \$32 million more than was appropriated?

Mr C. Johnson: Is the member referring to the move from \$107 million up to \$130 million?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: In last year's budget papers the appropriation was \$97 429 000, but it increased to \$107 million in this year's budget. Last year the appropriation was \$97 million, which increased to \$107 million, of which there is a budget note about the social enterprise fund, and the department actually spent \$130 million. In effect, the department had an extra \$32 million that was not appropriated in last year's budget. How did the department spend that \$32 million?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: As I understand it, a major reason for the difference is the Redress WA scheme, which accounts for \$30 million of the difference.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Is there only an extra \$2 million for the social enterprise fund?

Mr C. Johnson: There was supplementary funding of \$30 million for Redress. We also had some not-for-profit funding given to us as part of the 2011–12 budget of about \$2.2 million. The social enterprise fund money came through in the 2011-12 budget. It was \$10.2 million in that particular year, but then we re-profiled it because we knew that we would not spend \$2.2 million in that one year. We re-profiled that over the next couple of years. The member will see that the social enterprise fund has been re-profiled into the out years in "Major Spending Changes".

Mr P. ABETZ: I refer to page 715, "Average Cost per Strategic/Policy Coordination for Volunteers". Could the minister outline the nature of the projects and services included, and what does the department do in the context of supporting volunteering?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: The department provides assistance to volunteering through leadership through the "Vital Volunteering Strategy 2011-16", which guides the activities of the department. There is also strong focus on community education to link volunteering engaging organisations for resources that ensure that volunteers are appropriately managed.

There is also a funding, grant and sponsorship provided to volunteer groups to directly deliver services. There are partnerships established with service agencies and volunteer-engaging organisations. I will ask Ms Perkins to add additional information about how support is provided to the volunteering sector.

[4.50 pm]

Ms J. Perkins: Vital Volunteering was launched in May 2011 and documents a range of commitments to support and promote volunteering in Western Australia. As part of that, the department subsidises police and working with children checks to reduce barriers to volunteering for a number of non-government organisations. Last year we introduced the presentation of 50-year volunteer service badges to volunteers. It is a very important part of recognising the significant commitment that volunteers make. To date, we have provided over 200 medals to recipients who have volunteered for 50 years for the same organisation. In our 2012–13 budget we will support volunteering through funding of just over \$1 million via two key funding programs. That includes the sector support program, which is partly funded through Volunteering WA, and the volunteer development program. That funds about 16 local volunteer centres. We also provided grant funding, or will provide it in 2012–13, to support a range of one-off volunteering activities through things such as the volunteering symposium, activities through National Volunteer Week and Thank a Volunteer Day. Recently, the school volunteer program was provided funding of \$50 000 as part of the department's youth mentoring demonstration project grants. That project will work over the next couple of years to look at the important role volunteering plays in mentoring.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: Can the minister tell us how many FTEs in the department are involved in supporting volunteers in the community?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: As I explained earlier, the department covers all of its policy areas, not in specific silos but with officers engaged across a number of areas.

Ms J. Perkins: I do not have separate stand-alone policy officers. The 60 FTEs work within our service to cover and address a range of portfolio areas in line with government priorities and the strategic directions of the

department. At any one point in time a number of people could be working on certain projects in the volunteering space.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: Can the minister provide the funding figures for the volunteer resource centres that are dotted around the state? He might have to provide this via supplementary information. What funding goes to each volunteer resource centre around the state?

Ms J. Perkins: I can provide that. I draw attention to the fact that we have just invited those centres to put in new offers for new service contracts. We are now in the process of reviewing those. I can give information in terms of the current funding for those centres. Would the member like me to go through all of those?

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: Briefly, if you could.

Ms J. Perkins: The Albany Regional Volunteer Service receives annual funding of \$33 865. Busselton receives a similar amount. The Cities of Armadale, Cockburn, Fremantle, Melville, Nedlands and Swan each receive just under \$30 000. Last year, the Kalgoorlie Boulder Volunteer Centre received and the volunteer resource centres at Nannup and Peel received \$33 800. The Shire of Esperance receives funding of \$29 000; the Roman Catholic Bishop of Geraldton-run Centacare Family Services, through the Centacare Volunteer Service, receives funding of \$40 000. The Volunteer Centre of WA receives \$341 000 through the statewide volunteer support service. It also receives funding of \$166 000 for the YVolunteer program. The Manjimup Volunteer and Resource Centre received \$33 000 last year. Volunteer South West received \$33 000 as did the Wickepin Community Resource Centre. That is the funding provided in 2011–12 across the volunteer sectors.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I should point out the Busselton reference is actually the Busselton Dunsborough Environment Centre.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I think in the department's publication "Vital Volunteering", or something similar—I do not know what it is called—there is reference to the fact that legislation is being reviewed. The working with children legislation was mentioned. What other legislation is being reviewed and when will that be concluded?

Ms J. Perkins: I note that commitment under Vital Volunteering —

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, can I get that answer through you?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Yes, certainly.

Ms J. Perkins: That refers to an ongoing role the department has in terms of monitoring and reviewing legislation. We do that on an ongoing basis. We are not necessarily reviewing a particular piece of legislation at this point. We have provided comment, for example, in monitoring legislation in 2011 including the national model occupational safety and health legislation, the Australian charities and not-for-profit commission bill, and the Associations and Incorporation Act. The work being done in that space is really to monitor and look at the legislation that is coming through and raising issues about how it may impact volunteers.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: I refer to "Major Spending Changes" on page 712. I know the answer the minister will give me under the efficiency dividend line item, but maybe the director general could elaborate, as did Mr Murphy in a previous session. He indicated he has things lined up for what may be the efficiency dividend. Does the Department for Communities have any suggestions at this point as to what it may cut or reduce to get its efficiency dividend down?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Indeed, the answer is the same as that for the previous department in that the minister will be working with the director general and senior officers of the department to identify changes in expenditure that can be identified for the next 12 months. Those decisions will be made between now and 1 July.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: As in the previous session, the department already has in place ideations or notions of what it is looking to change to reach this efficiency dividend. Has this department any notions of what it is looking at, to achieve its efficiency dividend?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I will ask the director general to provide a general comment. It needs to be understood that what departments might be looking at or thinking about, as they are meant to, do not necessarily accord with what will be final decisions. Obviously there needs to be discussions with the minister and decisions made on the basis of good information and options being provided by the department. That is the process. As I said, that will occur between now and 1 July.

Ms J. Perkins: I can add to that. As a department, we are currently looking at all our business functions and processes to identify where there might be options. There is nothing yet on the agenda. It will be a focus for us over the coming weeks to ensure we can actually identify where efficiencies can be made.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the line item “Seniors Safety and Security Rebate” under “Major Spending Changes” on page 712. I understand the rebate was undersubscribed in 2011–12. What are the reasons for that? I note also that it is not in the forward estimates, so can we anticipate it will finish at the end of this year? I ask for the number of applications in this period and what is the backlog in processing those applications?

[5.00 pm]

Mr J.H.D. DAY: As indicated here, \$2.427 million is allocated for 2012–13, \$2.562 million for 2013–14 and \$746 000 for 2014–15. The program is expected to operate for another two years. In relation to the number of grants that have been provided, since the inception of the scheme in early 2009, \$5.55 million has been paid out for 16 768 security claims and 13 360 for safety claims. Therefore, quite a lot of people have been assisted. Clearly, for what is allocated in this budget, it is intended to operate until the end of 2012–13. My apologies; the figures I read out earlier were for the seniors’ cost-of-living rebate, not the safety and security rebate. The program is extended for another year to the end of 2012–13

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I had questions that the minister has not answered.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Which ones?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I reiterate an earlier question.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Which is?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I was asking about the backlog of applications to be processed. I know there was a bit of a surge and wondered how they were being processed.

Ms J. Perkins: At this stage, it takes us about 10 weeks to process those applications, so we are processing applications that have taken place over the last 10 weeks.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What is the number of the backlog, minister?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: What is the number of claims that have been lodged but not paid as yet?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I do not know whether we would have that precise figure.

Ms J. Perkins: There are a number of applications. I guess at this stage we are not anticipating a backlog as such in terms of them being processed in that 10-week time frame.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Therefore, there is zero backlog, but the processing time is about 10 weeks.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: How many are in the pile at the moment or how tall is the pile? Maybe I will put it that way.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: There are 1 200.

[Mr P.B. Watson took the chair.]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I have a final question on this. Who is processing those applications; are any volunteers processing them?

Ms J. Perkins: No; we do not have volunteers undertaking that type of work. The applications are processed by the paid staff in the Seniors Card centre.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: How many full-time equivalent paid staff are processing those applications?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: There are six FTEs in the Seniors Card centre. I ask Dr MacArthur to provide some information.

Dr K. MacArthur: There are six dedicated FTE staff working on processing the claims and there are 12 FTEs working on Seniors Cards generally.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I cannot hear.

Dr K. MacArthur: In response to the member’s question about how many people are processing the safety and security rebate, we have six people dedicated to that task, but within the Seniors Card centre generally, there would be 12 FTE staff, and they also look at the cost-of-living rebates and Seniors Card applications.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Are they all paid positions?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Yes.

Mr A.P. O’GORMAN: I refer to note 6 on page 715 that states that the 2011–12 estimated actual is less than the 2011–12 budget; this relates to Seniors Cards. There was a higher than anticipated uptake of Seniors Cards. What methods are in place for predicting that? Note 6 also refers to the redevelopment of the business processing system. Can the minister tell us what that involves?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I suspect that the increased numbers would presumably be based on the demographic information available obtained through Australian Bureau of Statistics census gathering and probably some of the work done by the Department of Planning. That is a guess. I will ask Ms Dawkins to comment.

Ms M.A. Dawkins: We do very extensive economic modelling to project those figures into the future. It is based on ABS data—the census. We also use the uptake information as it comes through on a regular basis. We often have peaks in uptake. We obviously have to project workforce participation patterns, because the criteria is dependent on the number of people working 25 hours or less a week. Therefore, it is a range of ABS data, and using our own uptake as the year progresses.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: And is the business process being redesigned?

Ms M.A. Dawkins: I might get Dr MacArthur to answer that question; it is her area.

Dr K. MacArthur: It has been necessary to redevelop the database because the Seniors Card centre had not originally been set up to make payments, so it was necessary to provide infrastructure to enable us to be able to handle the amount of payments.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: So is it a software upgrade essentially?

Dr K. MacArthur: Yes.

The appropriation was recommended.