

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Robyn McSweeney; Hon Philip Gardiner; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Brian Ellis; Hon Alison Xamon

Division 61: Child Protection, \$331 309 000 —

Hon Liz Behjat, Acting Chair.

Hon Robyn McSweeney, Minister for Child Protection.

Mr T. Murphy, Director General.

Ms J. McGrath, Executive Director, Corporate and Business Services.

Ms F. Lander, Executive Director, Policy and Learning.

Mr S. Glew, Executive Director, Service Standards and Contracting.

Mr J. Hancock, Executive Director, Country Services.

The ACTING CHAIR: On behalf of the Legislative Council estimates and financial operations committee, I would like to welcome you to today's hearing. Before we begin, I must ask you to take either the oath or affirmation.

This hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private either of its own motion or at the witnesses' request. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

The ACTING CHAIR: Members are asked to sit towards the front of the chamber on the non-government benches where practicable so that witnesses will not have to turn their heads to the back of the chamber when answering questions.

It will greatly assist Hansard if when referring to the *Budget Statements* volumes or the consolidated account estimates, members give the page number, item, program, amount, and so on in preface to their questions.

If supplementary information is to be provided, I ask your cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the committee's clerk within five working days of receipt of the questions. An example of the required Hansard style for the documents has been provided to your advisers.

The committee reminds agency representatives to respond to questions in a succinct manner and to limit the extent of personal observations.

At this time, I would ask each of the witnesses whether they have read, understood and completed the "Information for Witnesses" form.

The Witnesses: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: Do all the witnesses fully understand the meaning and effect of the provisions of that document?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: The Leader of the Opposition.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I refer to the total appropriations provided to deliver services under "Appropriations, Expenses and Cash Assets" on page 779 of volume 3 of the *Budget Statements*. I note that there is a dip between the budgeted amount for 2009-10 and the amount for 2010-11. Reading deeper into the budget document, I could find, if we like, a corresponding dip of about \$2 million in service 2 on page 781. However, I could not find any other areas under the services that add up to that dip in the appropriation for that year. Can the minister explain that to me?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I will hand over to the director general to explain that dip.

Mr T. Murphy: It will take a bit of time to trace it through to the specific services. Basically, that dip is due to demand funding received by the department being allocated just for the 2009-10 year. It will be reconsidered for the 2010-11 budget process. It is an amount of \$15 million. While it is not quite exact, there are a number of other ups and downs, but, essentially, that is the one that explains the difference.

[5.10 pm]

Hon SUE ELLERY: In the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations subcommittee hearings earlier in March, the department indicated that it expected a cash deficit of about \$9.5 million. Looking at the

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Budget Statements, it seems to me that the deficit might be a bit higher than that. What is the anticipated cash deficit for the end of this financial year?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: For what number?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am on the same page as the minister's appropriations.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: There has been an increase of \$38.135 million—is that what the member wants to know?

Hon SUE ELLERY: No; I just want to check that my sums are right because I make it about \$12.357 million.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Is the member referring to the increase of \$12.356 million?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes. In March the director general gave evidence that he expected an end-of-financial-year cash deficit of about \$9.5 million. We are now about two weeks away from the end of the financial year. I am asking whether that cash deficit is still expected or whether it will be bit higher than that.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No, because \$8 million has been allocated to fee-for-service placements; \$4.393 million for pay rise funding; \$1.853 million to government housing; \$917 000 for the working with children card; and \$250 000 additional funding for the place to call home initiative. The \$4.378 million was a three per cent efficiency dividend. Does that answer the question?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Therefore, is the \$9.5 million referred to in March now nothing? Somebody needs to tell me that.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No; we have \$8 million and \$4.39 million. The \$12.39 million was additional funding.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I want the minister to absolutely confirm that there is no cash deficit at the end of this financial year.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Thank you. I turn to the other matter raised in the subcommittee hearings earlier this year, which is the matter of full-time equivalent staff. By way of a reference point in the *Budget Statements*, I am referring to the line item "Employees (Full Time Equivalents)" under each of the three services, the first of which appears in service 1, "Supporting Children and Young People in the CEOs Care" on page 783. By the time of those hearings, the Treasurer had announced in February a total public sector cap of around 99 000 FTE staff. He based individual departmental caps on the 2008-09 budget figures. At the time of that conversation earlier this year, the Department for Child Protection's FTE level was higher than the cap allowed. This budget puts the 2009-10 FTE figure at 2 050—which is great—but that does not reconcile with the cap set by the Treasurer in February. How will the department meet the Treasurer's cap; and, if it will not meet the cap, how will the issue be resolved? I make the point that, by way of policy, the minister's agency is not the only agency in this position. I expect that cabinet or the minister and her colleagues will have worked out some way by which agencies with a discrepancy between their FTE levels and the cap will resolve that issue.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: The Department of Treasury and Finance has given a public sector exemption. There has been an increase of 244 FTEs, with 85 being for demand growth. In 2007-08, the actual figure was 1 577 FTEs; in 2008-09, the estimated number was 1 821; and in 2009-10, the figure was 2 050. Getting back to the figure of 244 FTEs, we have 85 for demand growth; 55 for new residential care facilities; 47 FTEs for mandatory reporting; 29 for increased skilling of existing service delivery and other staff, including 12 new SPDOs; 28 FTEs for responsible parenting; new staff of 22; and increased usage of 7 FTEs.

There was an increase of 229 FTEs due to the following: full-year filling of 100 new service delivery positions provided during 2008-09; 68 additional positions for the reform and expansion of residential care services; an increase of 52 to fill existing permanent positions; 48 additional positions from the 2009-10 budget process, which amounted to 33 additional case workers in the care for children and child protection areas; nine domestic violence intake teams in the country; three remote community child protection workers; three misconduct function workers; and two positions already included in that base.

Hon SUE ELLERY: My question was actually about what I think the minister described as the exemption. Is there an agreed figure; that is, the total 2 050 —

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: The 2 050 is the total—the agreed figure.

Hon SUE ELLERY: It is agreed with Treasury and whoever else.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes, it is the agreed figure.

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Hon SUE ELLERY: Thank you. I refer to the last dot point on page 781 of the *Budget Statements*, which is about providing support to individuals and families at risk or in crisis. It also relates to service 3, which is where it is implemented in terms of supporting individuals and families in crisis. When I was trying to identify where the investment is in that dot point and in that service, I could see additional funds in service 3 coming from the national homelessness program, but I wonder whether the minister can identify for me where the greater state investment is in service 3. All I could see were an additional five FTEs. I might start the discussion there. Some work has been done around the strategic framework on supporting individuals and families at risk, and I commend the department for the work on that strategic framework, but what I have not been able to see is whether any money has been invested in service 3. I can see money in service 2, but I cannot see money in service 3, which is really about early intervention for families at risk, rather than families in which the child is about to be taken into care—those for whom the risk is perhaps a bit lower.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes. There was money in the budget for the non-government organisations—for Wanslea Family Services and Anglicare—and that was for children who were at risk of entering care —

Hon SUE ELLERY: Is that not in service 2, though?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Sorry. The member was right; \$9.96 million was in the national partnership agreement funding. However, for the state, there was \$1.3 million for the domestic violence intake teams; \$1.2 million for the hardship utility grant scheme and financial counselling; \$1.1 million for the responsible parenting initiative, which was for the one-year full-year rollout; \$750 000 for remote community child protection workers, which were in Blackstone, Warakurna, and Burringurrah; and \$690 000 for the working with children funding for the information system.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I refer to service 3 on page 785. In last year's budget an efficiency indicator was the number of clients seen, and the work done in the first version of the demand model was based on a prediction of about 100 000 clients. I think the figure that appeared in last year's budget was that 105 000 clients were seen. In this budget, note (d) on page 785 is about the number of clients but there is a significant difference of about 30 000 between the figure that was relied on in the demand model prepared for the last budget and the number that appeared in the last budget. I do not understand why that would be the case. I do not think that 30 000 clients would have been transferred to the Department for Communities, so I do not know where they have gone.

[5.20 pm]

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: As I have not personally seen that 100 000 figure, I will take that on notice. We will get back to the member on that. I realise that was in the demand model, but I have not actually seen that projected anywhere, apart from the demand model with the averages —

Hon SUE ELLERY: Except it was in last year's published budget papers.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes, I understand that. But what I am saying is that we will take that on notice because it is a discrepancy. I do not know where that is coming from. That was the projected figure in the demand model but it is not stacking up under these figures. I admit that.

[*Supplementary Information No G1.*]

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: Expenditure of \$331 million, as I have discovered, is all to do with services 1, 2 and 3. I added the figures up and it is all to do with working with children in difficult circumstances.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: What page is the member referring to?

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: On page 779 is the aggregate, but I am really looking at the tables on pages 783 to 785 and the footnotes to those three tables. The part that must be most distressing to the department itself—because I find it distressing myself—is that it is almost like a losing battle. The trend lines are all going in the wrong direction, no matter how hard everyone is working. I guess what I am coming to, as I said when I was boring members on Tuesday night, is whether we are getting —

The ACTING CHAIR: Will the member get to the question after the preamble.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: I am getting to that, Madam Acting Chair. Is the department getting to parents, as soon as they have children, to try to help the parents early enough? Following on from what Hon Sue Ellery said, is the department getting to the parents early enough before damage is set in train, instead of trying to make a very difficult rescue? Is the department getting to the parents soon enough to have an impact upon not just the children, but the parents as well, because they are crucial in bringing up the children at that early stage?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I agree with the member. It is parents learning how to parent, or parents not knowing how to parent. It is crucial that we do that. It is across child protection, it is across health and it is across education. We are working on it. The federal government and the Western Australian government have an

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agreement to have five early childhood learning centres in the north west, where they are needed. We have the Best Start program for parents—that is when children are visited from the age of zero to two. I understand it is not in here, but the Department for Communities has a range of parenting programs and a parenting centre. Anyone can get help throughout Western Australia from parenting centres. We need to invest more in parenting. As a minister, I am looking at that. We are working on it throughout the state. We will continue to do so because it is critical.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: Do we have the resources of sociologists and psychologists? Do we have enough already or do we need to have a plan to train people through universities et cetera?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It has been very hard to attract psychologists into government, because they can earn a lot more in private practice. A couple of years ago, it was very hard to get clinical psychologists. I will hand over to the director general. I believe that we are getting more clinical psychologists. We have them in place.

Mr T. Murphy: We are very confident in our recruitment of all the staff necessary. Our preferred qualification in the department is social work for most field officers, but a range of other professional and tertiary qualifications can qualify, with adequate in-service training, to work in our department, whether on family support or in child protection and looking after children who are taken into care. As the minister said, we have also increased the number of psychologists we have in the department. They are a particular challenge. The commonwealth's decision to provide Medicare rebates for the services of psychologists has resulted in a number of psychologists choosing to work in private practice, and that has increased the demand on a limited pool. However, we have recruited well in the past year, having changed our intake to include four-year qualified registered psychologists, subject to adequate supervision and so forth being available. Most positions have been filled. Our difficulties now lie in the remote areas of the state and in residential services, where we still have some vacancies.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: My question relates to the foster care partnership. I note the reference to the foster care partnership in the seventh dot point on page 781 of the *Budget Statements*. Can the minister explain how the foster care partnership works, and what assessment of foster carers takes place?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I chaired a committee a couple of years ago that looked at the adequacy of foster care, and also Prudence Ford, in her review, recommended strengthening the provision of training for foster carers and that the department acknowledge, in a good way, the foster carer as a critical team member in the provision of care. Foster carers are absolutely critical, because they are the ones who have the day-to-day care of the child. Since being in government I have relaxed some of the rules that have affected the children, such as foster parents having to go back to the chief executive officer to allow a foster child to get a driver's licence, or to have a sleepover. I have allowed the foster carers to make those decisions, because they have the child, and it was such an impost on them to have to go back to the department all the time. The foster care partnership policy has recently been released following extensive consultation with the foster care involvement. This model highlights the critical role of a foster family team and how the department's care teams work in partnership with a foster family to ensure that the placement is facilitating the child's safety and wellbeing. The foster care partnership model is concentrated on the core relationship of a foster family with the child and the department's relationship with the foster family. It is centred on the child and highlights the critical role of that foster family team in providing daily protection to that child. The third element of that model is the supporting role of the department's care team. Through honest, open communication, the Department for Child Protection's care team works in partnership with the foster family. It has to be a partnership for it to work, and I am pleased to see that that has started. A competency-based assessment framework for foster carers was implemented during 2008-09, and assesses carers against five key competencies specified in the act. This framework provides a very transparent process.

[5.30 pm]

Hon JON FORD: I refer to the major policy decisions on page 780. Under the subtitle "3% Efficiency Dividend" is the line item "Fleet Management Efficiencies". It has an ongoing significant reduction in funding. Could the minister explain to me what those reductions were targeted at, particularly from a regional perspective? I want to know whether there is any reduction in the number of access vehicles for regional offices.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Four-wheel-drive vehicles will be replaced in remote areas. One-third of the existing four-wheel-drive vehicles will be replaced with lower-cost alternatives such as standard sedans in country areas, not impacting on service delivery. I have just been up to Mt Newman. Obviously, a sedan could not be driven on some of those roads, and also the area around Halls Creek. The number of those vehicles will not be reduced. The number of four-wheel drives that are city-based will be reduced. We will look at reducing home garaging of the fleet. The policy on staff home garaging vehicles has been revised to reduce the home

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garaging of vehicles, which will result in lower fringe benefits tax required to be paid and will reduce the cost of the existing fleet. The existing vehicle fleet will be replaced with four-cylinder cars, where they can be, instead of the higher-cost six-cylinder cars. Monitoring of the existing fleet will be improved, and the fleet will be monitored more closely to ensure that all vehicles are efficiently and effectively used across the department, which could include the rotation of vehicles to maximise the use of vehicles to reduce costs.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: On top of that, does the department meet the global reduction in motor vehicles that the Premier has announced, which is something like 10 per cent of the government vehicle fleet, on top of the efficiencies that the department is already making as part of the three per cent efficiency dividend?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I have not been advised of that yet, but I have seen it in *The West Australian*.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Has the department not been advised through the Department of Treasury and Finance of a requirement to reduce its fleet?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No, not as yet.

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: My question relates to the sixth dot point on page 781. There is a reference to a range of strategies being implemented to protect children and young people. I presume this is where the income management efficiency fits. Can the minister please advise how the income management initiative is going in WA, where it operates, the number of referrals and the preliminary outcomes that have been achieved?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Income management for child protection is a really unique management tool. It operates only in Western Australia. It is a case-by-case response and not a community-wide response. I would personally love it to be a community-wide response because I believe in it so much. It is used to assist in addressing the neglect of children when parents' use of available financial resources is contributing to the neglect, and income management when that income management is in the best interests of the child. Income management can be used as part of a reunification plan to enable a child to return home safely. If parents get a Basics card and all they can buy on that Basics card is food, not alcohol or cigarettes, there will be no alcohol in the family. That could settle things down for quite a while until those people are able to go off income management. There is voluntary income management and mandatory income management. Only 22 families are on mandatory income management but about 135 are on voluntary income management. Those on voluntary income management say that they like it a great deal because the bills are paid and they can buy only food. Parents who are referred by the Department for Child Protection to Centrelink for income management receive ongoing case management from the department. They are provided with relevant services, such as parenting support. They are referred by Centrelink to non-compulsory financial counselling or money management services. Income management started in Cannington.

The ACTING CHAIR: I am sorry to interrupt the minister, but I am just wondering if perhaps she might like to wrap that up or table the document.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I believe that every member here knows that I am a great supporter of income management.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Hon ED DERMER: My questions relate to pages 780 and 781. I will start with page 780, if I may. The three per cent efficiency dividend refers to a reduction in policy staff resulting in a reduction of \$981 000 in 2009-10 and then in excess of \$1 million for each of the forward estimate years. I would be grateful for an indication of what that reduction in expenditure would equate to with the number of full-time equivalent policy staff.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It is 12.

Hon ED DERMER: I am trying to get a sense of proportion. That is a reduction of 12. What is the total number of policy staff available?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: While the director general is looking for an answer to the question, I will expand just on the number of 12 staff: five family and domestic violence staff, three children and young people staff, two child protection staff, one responsible parenting staff and one individual family support staff.

Hon ED DERMER: That is reducing the number of staff in each of those areas.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It is a reduction in policy staff. We now have 82 staff.

Hon ED DERMER: Basically, it is a reduction of 12, leaving 82 staff, which would otherwise be 94.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes.

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Hon ED DERMER: I am trying to take that into account and assess what the impact will probably be of reducing those staff numbers and what work that has been carried out to date will be discontinued.

The ACTING CHAIR: I might point out that that is probably more of a policy issue. The minister should feel free to answer if she wants to, but I do not think she really needs to.

Hon SUE ELLERY: It is a matter of policy; it is a matter of detail.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It is 84 full-time staff with 12 policy staff fewer and, yes, it is going to impact but, hopefully, it is manageable and will be manageable. It is just that the impact of the three per cent efficiency dividend is that 12 policy staff will no longer be there.

Hon ED DERMER: Can the minister identify particular areas of policy examination that will discontinue?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes. I did identify them. There were five family and domestic violence staff, three children and young people staff, two child protection staff, one responsible parenting staff and one individual family support staff.

Hon ED DERMER: That is as specific as the minister can be about what work will be reduced or discontinued. One of my colleagues has already referred to the sixth dot point on page 781, which refers to using evidence-based policy development, and reads —

A range of strategies to protect children and young people from abuse are being implemented, using evidence-based policy development ...

I am endeavouring to reconcile a greater emphasis on evidence-based policy development with a reduction in the policy staff referred to as part of the three per cent efficiency dividend. I would be grateful for an explanation of how we can extend evidence-based policy development, while at the same time reduce policy staff.

[5.40 pm]

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: There is nothing specific on that, but when one looks at what the department does with the implementation of mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse, one sees that the policy has been decided; it has been established. The implementation of the signs of safety child protection practice framework has been done. Policy decisions being implemented are the establishment of child first assessment and interview teams in partnership with the WA Police; the interagency early intervention framework policy and protocols in partnership with King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women focusing on at-risk newborn babies; compulsory income management all across the Kimberley and Cannington districts and now in four other city areas; the policy on neglect, which I might add I instigated from opposition; and completion of phase 2 of Assist, the client information service that will support all of the child protection system. These initiatives are being implemented. They are all policy decisions and they have been implemented and that is ongoing. They are all evidence based.

Hon ED DERMER: Is the minister satisfied that this emphasis on evidence-based development can continue unimpeded by the reduction in policy staff?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I am satisfied that it can.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I refer to the sixth dot point on page 781 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, which refers to mandatory reporting. I understand there were 382 reports up to 31 March, at least. Does this reflect an increase in the number of reports compared with the previous years; and, if so, by how many? I have some follow-up questions from that.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: There has been a 22 per cent increase in child protection notifications and an 84 per cent increase in child sexual abuse notifications. That sounds horrific, but it was from a number of around 360, if I remember correctly. Some of those were multiple reports.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Does the minister know the number of children that represented?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I am fairly sure that it represents around 360 children. I am happy to provide the member with further information, because it shows how many reports have been made by teachers, police, nurses and doctors. When I said that some of those were multiple reports, it means that a doctor, a nurse and sometimes a midwife have all made reports.

The ACTING CHAIR: That will be provided as supplementary information.

[*Supplementary Information No G2.*]

Hon ALISON XAMON: How is mandatory funding allocated? Specifically, what proportion of funds is allocated to investigation, prosecution, treatment and also prevention? I wanted to get a picture of how that is playing out.

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Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: The allocation over four years was \$68 million, including \$43.9 million for the Department for Child Protection to implement it. Is that the line of the member's question?

Hon ALISON XAMON: Implementation can take a number of forms. I am trying to get an idea of how that is broken down as well. Does the minister have those figures?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It is entirely in assessment and investigation. I must say that the mandatory reporting system set up by the previous government is a brilliant system. I was very sceptical before I went out and looked at the office. It is absolutely state-of-the-art and probably the best system that I have seen in Australia.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I hope Hansard got that!

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: As the Minister for Child Protection, I have continued the mandatory reporting system. I have been minister for eight months and I do not see anything wrong in saying that the previous minister did the right thing about the reporting of sexual abuse of children. I think we are both on the same page in that respect. However, before the term of this government ends, I will make it mandatory for all forms of abuse to be reported.

I return to the question asked by Hon Alison Xamon. The allocation covers staff numbers at the centre, assessment, working with police, and the information systems at the core unit. The amount allocated to the unit was \$3 803 000 to set up information systems, infrastructure maintenance, on-call training and professional education. There was an allocation of \$4 905 000 for training, learning development and after-hours services. We have six FTEs in crisis care. The Crisis Care Helpline is run from this unit. When the Department for Child Protection is called after hours anywhere in the state, the call goes to Crisis Care. One of the six staff at Crisis Care takes the call and calls the person on duty in the area from which the call came, who will then contact the police and perform the call-out. There are also allocations for country services, non-government services, sexual abuse treatment and HR support, and the balance goes to DCP core services, for which there are 53 FTEs in the mandatory reporting unit.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I refer to the sixth dot point under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" on page 781. It states, in part —

A range of strategies to protect children and young people from abuse are being implemented, using evidence-based policy development ...

What evidence led to the decision to cease funding for the men's program run by SafeCare? My understanding is that the only evidence that existed was the evaluation report, which evaluated the program as being successful and safe. Is it the case that there are now more children at risk of abuse because the corrective services system is not meeting the therapeutic needs of men who have been abused and actually want to do something to address their behaviour?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: My answer to that is that there are clinical psychologists in Western Australia, and if men go to a general practitioner, they can be referred to a clinical psychologist who specialises in that area—there are a few—to get treatment. The report that came out during the member's time as minister —

Hon SUE ELLERY: It was actually before my time as minister.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: There were concerns raised about that program. I had concerns because —

Hon SUE ELLERY: With respect, I know about the minister's personal concerns. I am asking about the evidence-based policy.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: The evidence base was that SafeCare had two arms to its program. One was to do with children and the other was to do with the perpetrators. There is evidence that these programs work and there is evidence that they do not work, it just depends on what —

Hon SUE ELLERY: That is what I am asking. Where is the evidence to show that they were not working?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: As the minister, I can sometimes make a decision, and my decision was to fund UnitingCare West \$500 000 to put the money towards children who have been abused because that is where it is really needed. Clinical psychologists are there and anyone can go to them.

[5.50 pm]

Hon SUE ELLERY: So the minister is not able to point to any —

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The ACTING CHAIR: Order! Members, I know that I am relatively new at this, but it is probably appropriate that the questions be put one at a time rather than across the chamber in the way that they are being put at the moment. Is that not usually the case in these hearings?

Hon SUE ELLERY: No-one was putting questions back to me. Anyway, I will continue. Given that I have not been able to be provided with any evidence, I refer again to the same dot point about a range of strategies to protect children and young people from abuse using evidence-based policy development. I refer also to the comment the minister has just made, in response to the question from Hon Alison Xamon, about the minister's intention to include in mandatory reporting all forms of abuse against children. Can the minister identify the evidence-based research that demonstrates the benefits to children of expanding mandatory reporting to include all forms of abuse?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I have the view, and so do many other people, that if a child is being neglected, it should be reported. In South Australia, mandatory reporting for cases of neglect has been in place since 1965. I believe that if a child is being neglected, or is being physically or mentally abused, and that is left unreported, that child is left in danger. I do not like children to be left in danger.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Absolutely not, minister; no-one would suggest that for one moment. I respect the minister's point of view on mandatory reporting. However, I am asking the minister to provide to me the evidence base that the minister will be relying upon to say to the Parliament that this is why we should bring in mandatory reporting. Where is the evidence to show that mandatory reporting will result in better outcomes for children?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It is because there are so many children in Western Australia and in Australia who are being neglected, and that is well documented. The system that is used in South Australia is the one that I will probably be looking at, and have looked at, as the one to adopt in this state. However, the problem is that the system may become very overloaded. That is certainly evident from the Wood report about the Department of Community Services in New South Wales. What I am seeking to do in this state, and what the department is seeking to do and was already doing under the watch of the former minister, is divert. That means that if a call comes in about a child who is being neglected, it is hoped that that child will then be put into some sort of support system, or the child's parents are put into some sort of support system—parental responsibility or whatever—that will help that child. I would really dearly love to see—I think we all would—a situation in which mandatory reporting occurs when a child is being physically abused or neglected so that the authorities can then put in place a system to ensure that that child does not continue to be neglected or abused.

Hon SUE ELLERY: What resources will be provided to ensure that, once a call about a child has been made, we do not end up with a similar situation to the one with DOCS in New South Wales, whereby the majority of the children were never sighted by any agency to which they might have been referred? What work has been done to model the resources that will be required to expand mandatory reporting to the extent to which the minister wants to expand it?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I do understand that. I am not going to sit here and say that it is all going to be rosy. We will need to look at that very carefully. But I am not going to allow our children to continue to be hurt and neglected and have no-one pick that up.

Hon SUE ELLERY: No-one is suggesting that the minister would do that.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I know the Leader of the Opposition is not suggesting that. I will say very clearly for *Hansard* that the former minister was not suggesting that we should leave children to be neglected. However, as the minister responsible, I am not going to watch our children continue to be neglected at a rate of knots that is alarming me greatly.

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: Paragraph 2 on page 785 of the *Budget Statements* refers to responsible parenting. Can the minister please explain what preparations have been made to facilitate the use of responsible parenting orders under the Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I am pleased with the progress that has been made to pave the way for the proper use of that act as a tool for agencies to engage with families and provide them with parenting assistance. As has been pointed out today, the role of parenting is absolutely crucial. Parents are responsible for managing their children's behaviour, whether that involves persistent non-attendance at school, antisocial behaviour either at school, in the community or at home, or juvenile offending. The three key agencies—the Department for Child Protection, the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Corrective Services—have identified positions for designation as authorised officers under section 35 of the Parental Support and Responsibility Act, which will enable them to make responsible parenting agreements and orders and to request information from information-sharing agencies. That is critical. The information-sharing agencies are the

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Department for Child Protection, the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Education Services, the Department of Corrective Services, the Disability Services Commission, the Department of Health, the Department of Housing and the police department. The interagency implementation group is advising on and overseeing the implementation process. Although we have been talking about this process for a long time, it has only just begun in some places, such as Midland.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I will follow up on the question asked by Hon Sue Ellery about the defunding of the SafeCare program. I am aware that the SafeCare program had a number of elements to it. It was not as simple as treating women and children or men; its whole-of-family approach to dealing with either sexual abuse or the risk of sexual abuse in the family was renowned. Can the minister advise whether any programs within her portfolio have been allocated funding that would take a whole-of-family approach to deal with sexual abuse, which would not necessarily be covered by a perpetrator simply being referred by a GP to a clinical psychologist?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No, I have not. The SafeCare Young People's program was given \$133 000 in funding and the SafeCare Families program was given \$92 000. I took the view that the money was better spent in the children's area and that the perpetrators could be sent to a clinical psychologist. A lot of people in the community, including psychologists and people who are trained to deal with sexual abuse, were rather alarmed that perpetrators could be sent to SafeCare to undergo two years of psychological counselling for sexually abusing their little girl or little boy and be placed back into the family. There are two views. The member can read any of the literature she likes. There are those who would be horrified that people who insert their fingers into a little girl's vagina or put their penis into a little girl's mouth can receive two years of counselling and then be put back into the house in which the child is a voiceless little victim, and there are others who would agree with that. The member can read the two opposing views. I was faced with having to find savings because of the three per cent efficiency dividend and I had to make a decision about where the money would be best spent. UnitingCare West has been given \$500 000 for all those little children out there who have already suffered. I took the view, in discussing it with the department and having that report that was done on SafeCare, that there were some concerns that the money would go to children who had already been abused knowing that there were clinical psychologists who do deal with perpetrators.

[6.00 pm]

Hon ALISON XAMON: But there is no whole-of-family approach to those families that so desperately want help. The simple answer is no.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No. UnitingCare West actually does support the whole family and there are child sexual abuse therapy services—C-SATS—that do support the whole family. There are places where the whole family can get support.

Hon ALISON XAMON: But it is not being —

The ACTING CHAIR: I ask the member to refrain from making comment. I am sure the minister will be happy to have a conversation with her outside the chamber, but this hearing is for asking questions about the estimates, and I would rather stick to that so that I can follow the rules that have been given to me as well.

The Leader of the Opposition indicated that she had some further questions, but Hon Philip Gardiner has also indicated that he has some questions.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am writing out my questions to hand them in at the end.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: I refer to page 777 of the *Budget Statements*. My question is a bit about symbolism, but I recognise the seriousness of the child protection aspect of the department. There is roughly \$500 million all told being spent. My question is: will the minister consider changing the name of her department? We have heard in part about the child protection aspect. We have also heard a lot about parental assistance and support and all those kinds of things. Would the minister consider changing her title to something like the "Minister for Parental and Children Development and Child Protection"? It would give a positive aspect to all the work, which I have heard this evening the minister is doing. However, "Minister for Child Protection" is a very adversarial name, and the name "community services" does not mean anything to me. However, it entails, from what I have read, a lot of micro-work in parental areas.

The ACTING CHAIR: I am not sure that the member's question is in order.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: Can I ask the minister for a brief response?

The ACTING CHAIR: I leave it up to the minister.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: The department has changed its name over the years. It was formerly the Department for Family and Children's Services, then the Department for Community Development and then it

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was split into two departments. It was split into two for good reason and renamed the Department for Child Protection and the Department for Communities. One department is for child protection and one is for community services so that the focus in the first department is on child protection and the focus in the second department is on the parenting role. The departments have two distinct roles and I would not consider changing the names at this time. However, I do understand what the member has said.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Before I hand over my written question, I refer to page 786 under “Asset Investment Program”. I note that \$1.1 million has been allocated to the intensive therapeutic unit but that there is no money in the out years. I also note from discussions in the estimates hearings in the other place that there is an intention to bring into Parliament, perhaps later this year, legislation to give effect to the intensive therapeutic centre. That centre will need more money than is allocated in the budget to do the work. That was certainly so when the previous government was first contemplating these changes, and when they were contemplated by the minister prior to me. It was to be an eight-bed facility. Things are marching on and I suspect that eight beds are probably not quite enough. I am wondering what planning has been done, based on the work that I know has already been done around it, and what the model would look like. What amount of money does the minister think will be needed to get that facility up and running? Does the minister believe it needs more than eight beds? I would appreciate any comment the minister can give me about that.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes, the member is right: the Kath French Centre was initially allocated capital funding of \$1.2 million. Recurrent funding of \$900 000 is available to commence the facility. Additional recurrent funding has been requested to fully implement the interim secure centre—\$2.57 million in 2009-10 and \$2.644 million in 2010-11—and additional recurrent and capital funding between 2010 and 2011 will be required to expand the services. The plan is dependent on selling some of the assets that we have to build this very good therapeutic model of a secure care centre. The member is right that we do need more funding, and that will be dependent on the planning that we have done. I think it is about \$25 million. I will hand over to the director general.

Mr T. Murphy: As the member will appreciate, with planning an interim facility, our focus has largely been on that, and the capital funding we have for that is being utilised at the moment. The facility will be ready for use early next year, pending legislation. That will provide for eight beds. The way we are constructing it is five beds for boys, three beds for girls. We anticipate that ratio will be right, although it is reversible if need be. Concurrently, we have begun the most preliminary of planning for a 20-bed facility. Our preference would be to use the interim facility for either girls or boys, with probably still eight beds, and then build another facility on the same site, at a distance, with 12 beds. That would be a new 12-bed facility going up. With the way building costs and planning go, our estimate of the cost is around \$8 million at this stage. However, it really has not been planned to a sufficient degree for us to be confident about that figure staying the same, but it is indicative.

Hon SUE ELLERY: The Minister for Child Protection said that additional money has been requested. I remember when I was minister that there was a plan to sell certain of the properties that were on prime land. Has the minister requested additional money on top of what she expects to get from the sale of those properties? I just want the minister to clarify what she was saying.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No, it has been fully expended on —

Hon SUE ELLERY: On the basis of the sale of the existing properties.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes, on the basis of the sale of the existing properties.

The ACTING CHAIR: Are there any further questions? That being the case, everyone must be feeling a little bit hungry, I suppose. We were due to wrap this up at 6.15 pm, and I have either chaired it well or badly—I am not sure—but we have finished early.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: What are you saying about the previous Chairs!

The ACTING CHAIR: Just before closing, I would like to thank the Chair of our committee for giving me the opportunity to chair this session; I appreciate that. I thank all members for their indulgence, and if I made bad decisions, I am sorry; but if I made good ones, then great! I thank the minister and her advisers for coming along this evening. They are now discharged from their duties. I would like to remind everyone that we are due to resume at 7.15 pm.

Meeting suspended from 6.08 to 7.15 pm