

Division 26: Country High School Hostels Authority, \$6 949 000 —

Ms L.L. Baker, Chairman.

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

Ms S. O'Neill, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr D. Smith, Chief Finance Officer.

Mrs S. Couch, R/Director.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: The first question is from the member for Moore.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 310, “Asset Investment Program”, and the table heading “Works in Progress”. The total cost for the redevelopment program for the Geraldton Residential College is \$2.6 million, of which \$2.1 million is allocated this coming year. Given the combined effect of the influx of year 7 students into high school along with the closure of the boarding houses at Nagle Catholic College, is the minister confident that the level of expenditure listed will provide the level of accommodation necessary in Geraldton to accommodate these extra students, bearing in mind that Geraldton is the educational hub for the midwest region and surrounding pastoral areas?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I am advised that the upgrade occurring at the Geraldton Residential College will provide 16 new individual student bedrooms, and an upgrade of the existing activity and recreation spaces. The redevelopment will ensure that it is ready for an increase in demand for public school student boarding places in 2015 due to the relocation of year 7 to secondary school, and year 12 returning to a full cohort. The short answer is yes, it is expected to provide for the change to year 7. I will ask Sharyn O'Neill to provide further information.

Ms S. O'Neill: The minister referred to the upgrade, which the member is aware of, for the residential college. We are also having ongoing discussions with Nagle about the capital investment that the Catholic Education Office might make in the future to accommodate the closure of its residential facilities. More recently, I have had discussions with the residential college—Nagle—the Catholic Education Office, Strathalbyn Christian College and Geraldton Grammar School, and I am sure the member is aware that the outcome is confirmation that any student currently enrolled in the residential college will continue to be enrolled. We will not be in a position to take any additional non-government students for next year because of the capacity. Discussions will continue with the grammar school, should it want to have students at the college in future, about the possibility of an arrangement with it to secure places, as is the occurrence around the state at other locations.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Would that require the building of additional rooms; and, if so, will the private schools be expected to pay for the lion's share of that additional capacity?

Ms S. O'Neill: That is the current situation and position in other colleges also. While there is space—there has been space in Geraldton—the policy is that non-government students can access that space. If there is no space, then, in terms of the preference and the policy, they can secure space by injecting capital funds, which has happened in Albany and Broome, and Geraldton would be in a similar position. In future if those schools wanted to secure beds, like Nagle, they would need to enter into a discussion with us about the prospect of them contributing, and to date that has been a capital investment.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Will there be other avenues that could be explored apart from capital investment—perhaps a change to the fee structure?

Ms S. O'Neill: That will be a government decision. I am sure the minister would be interested in a proposition, should a private school have one that is equivalent to the necessary capital investment.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The first dot point on page 308 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” says that residential college enrolments and enrolment revenue have been affected by public awareness of the special inquiry undertaken by the Honourable Peter Blaxell. What is the government doing to restore public faith in country hostels following the Blaxell inquiry?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: My initial observation is that it has undertaken the inquiry and then it will put into effect recommendations from the inquiry to ensure there is less likelihood of similar events occurring in future. I will get Ms O'Neill to speak on the particular recommendations.

Ms S. O'Neill: The Blaxell inquiry and its recommendations are reflective of a period many years ago, and residential colleges have already undergone enormous changes in the intervening period. Arising from the recommendations, which were accepted by government and referred to the authority for action, was the requirement to develop a new, comprehensive, child-focused complaint system, which has been put in place. It

Extract from Hansard

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Mr Shane Love; Mr John Day; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Mick Murray

now links directly to the investigative capacities that my other department has, so we are partnering with the Country High School Hostels Authority in that regard. Expert child protection investigators will provide support on the investigation end. On the front end, we are running protective behaviours professional learning with the students, and we have also provided a 24 hours-a-day communications avenue for complaints, has not been available before. Previously the complaints would have been made to people who are potentially the perpetrators. The hostels now have an external complaint-making arrangement and staff have undertaken professional learning in that regard. Further, the boards have been involved in board training with the Public Sector Commissioner to ensure they are across what is required. Also, since that time, the whole infrastructure of boarding has changed. Students are more likely to be in individual rooms, and security, complaint handling arrangements and communication with parents have vastly changed. The department also makes available to residential colleges pastoral care teams and school psychologists. Also, since then, there is screening of people who work with children. There has been enormous change since that period, and more recently as a result of the recommendations.

[12.50 pm]

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I refer to page 310, “Asset Investment Program”. While current works are being undertaken in the main residential colleges, business cases regarding upgrades of residential colleges are being developed. What are the names of the residential colleges for which those business cases are being developed?

Mr D. Smith: These are subject to cabinet approval, but they include Broome, Merredin stage 2, Esperance stage 2 and Narrogin.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 12.52 to 2.00 pm