

Division 45: Child Protection and Family Support, \$537 291 000 —

Mr P. Abetz, Chairman.

Ms A.R. Mitchell, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Child Protection.

Mr T.M. Murphy, Director General.

Mr P. Byrne, Executive Director, Community and Business Services.

Mrs P. Beamish Burton, Acting Director, Finance.

Ms K. Benham, Executive Director, Policy and Learning.

Ms C.M. Stephens, Principal Policy Officer, Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Maylands.

Ms L.L. BAKER: If we start with the efficiency dividend of \$7.6 million in 2012–13 that is on page 569, the parliamentary secretary can run through her spiel. I refer to a letter from the acting director general to Hon Giz Watson late last year, 10 October 2012, in which that amount was confirmed and the department stated that it had reviewed its operating budget to achieve a \$7.6 million efficiency dividend. The acting director general went on to say that the department had only identified measures in 2012–13 and had not yet developed future strategies to achieve further efficiency dividends in future years. I wonder what other strategy the department anticipates implementing to meet the efficiency dividend. Given that \$7.6 million is quite a significant amount, I cannot imagine the department would be able to find a whole lot more, in view of all the services it provides. It is a bit of a convoluted question, but given the department has achieved \$7.6 million in efficiency dividends at the moment, what is the figure it sees in the future?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Murphy to respond directly to that specific question.

Mr T.M. Murphy: In October 2012, we were only at the beginning of trying to meet that efficiency dividend. The difficulty we experienced was projecting efficiencies that would save us that amount in a full year, but not being able to implement that for the full 2012–13 year. At the end of 2012–13, we identified and put in place a full set of savings to meet that \$7.6 million. I am happy to enumerate those if the member wants.

[9.10 pm]

Ms L.L. BAKER: That would be excellent.

Mr T.M. Murphy: I will go through them in some detail. There is \$1.8 million from reviewing the information technology structure, and streamlining and reducing services in some places. There is \$400 000 from the secure care unit, achieved through reducing its bed capacity in line with demand. That was quite able to be done.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Sorry; what capacity was that reducing?

Mr T.M. Murphy: At the secure care residential unit. We made a reduction of \$600 000 in emergency financial assistance. We were not able to meet that last year. However, that will carry forward. We went over our non-service delivery establishment quite heavily and reduced single staff across most directorates, giving us 8.8 full-time equivalents. We were able to reduce five positions by reducing the number of mentors who support the application of our client management system, which is quite mature now, so were quite able to let go of those positions. In emergency services—that is the service we provide in disasters such as floods, fires and the like—we combined some positions in regions where there is a low incidence of disaster. We reduced our family information and records bureau by two staff. All directorates got a 10 per cent cut to their operating budgets—stationery, printing, training, communications and the like. A more targeted review under which we could capitalise on under-spends in the previous year yielded another \$800 000. There was one bonus for the department. The efficiency dividend was originally calculated as applying to our contracted homelessness services, but this was later reversed as the national agreement had to be finalised for that to be put in place. That brought us almost to the \$7.6 million.

Ms L.L. BAKER: In relation to the IT saving that we have heard about, I am wondering about the context of that in light of the minister saying on 14 May 2013 that savings had been made by deferring planned enhancements to Assist, the department's case management system. I am interested to know what happened to those enhancements. An article in *The Australian* on 25 September last year, which I have a copy of, refers to Western Australia investing \$10 million in child protection to support the core IT system. It is a bit hard for me to put into context that Mr Murphy said the department had saved money on the IT system, yet in September last year it was reported that WA was investing \$10 million in child protection to support its core IT system. Could the parliamentary secretary clear that up for me?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Murphy to respond directly to the member.

Ms Lisa Baker; Ms Andrea Mitchell; Mr Roger Cook; Mrs Glenys Godfrey; Mr Peter Watson

Mr T.M. Murphy: I will do my best. Once again, I do not know what *The Australian* based those figures on, but it is worth prefacing this by saying that we have a very large IT spend; it is around \$27 million all up. That is a hefty spend in anybody's language. Therefore, frankly, it needs to be constantly looked at to see what savings can be made. If we go back to Assist, I suspect *The Australian* is referring to the cost of developing and implementing that system over time.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Does Mr Murphy want to look at the article or does he want me to just tell him a bit more about it?

The CHAIRMAN: Perhaps the member may have time to do that later rather than now. I am not sure that it directly relates to the line item.

Ms L.L. BAKER: The article states —

Paul Moss, director of client systems at the department, said the state required a partner that could support —

This is from Oracle —

the core PeopleSoft system, which had to function “24 hours a day for 365 days” in 60 to 70 offices spread across the state.

“PeopleSoft supports our core business, which is child protection. ... when a person rings up about a child to when the child leaves care when they turn 18 ...

Blah, blah, blah. That is the system.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: That has probably given us more information to respond to the member.

Mr T.M. Murphy: This is a \$2.5 million annual contract for the IT support of our client information system.

Ms L.L. BAKER: That was the department's saving.

Mr T.M. Murphy: No. Over four years that cost us \$10 million. Unfortunately, none of that can be saved. The savings are more in the additional enhancements and further developments of Assist that were planned a year ago. It is worth saying that our client management system, Assist, was designed 10 years ago and made the same error as every child protection system around the world; that is, to develop an IT system that drives human beings' work. Because working with families is so difficult, so problematic and so prone to error, tragedy and contention in our business, IT systems set up rules and procedures to drive people, and manage to achieve keeping them behind their desks and behind their computers a lot longer than they should be. The member can detect from the tone in my voice the disappointment with our own system and every system around the world, I hasten to add, that was designed 10 years ago. In fact, we needed fewer enhancements to our system and fewer additional parts to it; rather, we needed streamlining. Over the past 12 or 18 months—it is beginning to deliver now—we have been taking chunks out of our client management system so that our social workers can get out from behind the computers and spend more time with families. I know I have said this twice before, but I will say it again because it is an essential context: every child protection system around Australia and around the world made that error five to 10 years ago.

Mr R.H. COOK: My question relates to the spending changes on page 561, and in particular the growth in demand for child protection services. I note that that increase is around \$20 million right across the forward estimates, yet I also observed later in the income statement on page 569 and in the explanatory notes that the number of FTEs for the department is fairly much flatlining. There is an increase in growth of, and demand for, child protection services, as mirrored in those allocations, and the number of FTEs is essentially staying constant. My notes tell me that in this financial year the figure for growth in demand for child protection workers is \$21.7 million. What proportion of this funding, if any, will be directed to outsourcing child protection work and what particular aspects of the work will this relate to?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will start by saying that the department experienced a significant increase in child protection activity in 2012–13. Unfortunately, this is a trend that has been continuing in recent years. Our aim always is to work intensively with families to increase the safety of children. What we try to do, of course, is make sure that this work is done so that the child stays at home. I will ask Mr Murphy to provide specific information on that to the member.

[9.20 pm]

Mr T.M. Murphy: In respect of the allocation of growth funding this year, \$8.5 million is going into fee-for-service placement costs. These are individualised placements for children with very high needs who present a danger to themselves or to people in the community. This is an item for which costs have never before been specifically allocated in our internal budget, and we are catching up with that. It is an area of high growth and

great strain on the budget. For additional foster care placements purchased from the community sector, we are spending \$2.5 million. That is certainly an area that one would describe as outsourcing. The department recruits and supports foster carers and so does the community sector, and we purchase those placements from the community sector. The rest of the costs, for the most part, are unavoidable expenditure due to growth in the number of children in care, and the number of carers who are needed to look after them, so subsidies for children in care will cost about \$2.1 million. Case support for children in care will cost approximately an additional \$1.2 million. Then there are our own residential care facilities; they have been managed pretty tightly in terms of FTEs and the budget allocated to those but have not made sufficient allowance for holidays, sickness and so on for casual staff, so we are putting in \$1.5 million to catch up with that. I am very pleased to say that there will be \$500 000 allocated to establish two new family support networks—one in Mirrabooka and one in the Murchison. These will be the second and third family support networks. Family support networks are an alliance of community sector agencies and the department that provide a common entry point to family support services, to enable families to get earlier intervention family support than they otherwise might, as opposed to coming through the child protection system. This is a quite innovative approach that we have been trialling for the last year in Armadale, and we can establish two more of those in Mirrabooka and the Murchison at a cost of only \$500 000. Around \$5 million of the growth funds is allocated to unavoidable costs—increases in salaries, costs of government offices, regional housing and the like. There is not a lot of contracting out apart from, significantly, the additional foster care placements and the family support networks.

Mr R.H. COOK: Given this increase in the level of activity—I apologise; this is not an area that I am greatly familiar with, but I understand that the growth of people coming into care is around about six per cent each year—is it not extraordinary that we have a constant number of FTE in the department? Why has there not been an increase in the number of staff working in the department, given the level of work that seems to be confronting the area?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Murphy to respond.

Mr T.M. Murphy: Notwithstanding that growth, there is growth in the child protection area of safety and wellbeing assessments that are being done and in the number of child protection notifications that are occurring; there is growth in those areas. However, the number of matters coming in through the front door is reasonably stable—about 90 000 matters came through our front door last year, and that was up slightly from 87 000 the year before, but was actually well down on the more than 100 000 matters that came through our front door in 2007–08. So there are fewer numbers through the front door, but more investigation of child protection matters. In respect of children in care, we are continuing to bring additional children into care; however, the growth in bringing children into care last year was five per cent, so that is not a lot over population growth, and compared with five years previously, when the growth was 13 per cent, it is well down. Notwithstanding that growth, we are actually containing the amount of work we have to do with that. Essentially this is because we work through the Signs of Safety child protection practice framework that we have been implementing for five years, and it means that our assessments are quicker; our movement of families to be supported through family support, often provided by the community sector, is quicker; and those rates of growth, although still there, have been going down.

Mr R.H. COOK: I have one final follow-up question. Through the parliamentary secretary, Mr Murphy says that the rate of growth of children coming into care is about five per cent, so from my understanding, that is around 240 or 250 children?

Mr T.M. Murphy: Around 200 net.

Mr R.H. COOK: So the number of children in care is increasing by about 250, year on year, but the department is not increasing the number of staff to manage that increased workload. Does that not have an impact upon staff workloads?

Mr T.M. Murphy: Given the efficiency I was pointing to earlier—I really emphasise that this is an efficiency born of a more effective way of operating—there are a couple of key statistics to look at to tell us whether we are managing our workload. They include the average number of cases that workers are carrying, and that has been pretty steady at about 12 per worker over all of the last five years, which is, I am very proud to say, one of the lowest caseloads in Australia. Another statistic to keep an eye on is the number of cases we describe as “monitored”. Our aim over the last five years has been to have about 10 per cent of open cases being monitored—that is, not really on a watch list, but the tasks necessary to keep the cases going, occurring, but not actively assigned to a case manager. We have aimed for 10 per cent, and only in the last year, really, have we got to 10 per cent. Our monitored list is now at seven per cent of all open cases. So essentially, notwithstanding the growth, the total number of open cases is pretty stable, the caseloads are pretty stable, and the number and proportion of cases that are monitored is reducing. This is enabled through two things, as well as the general efficiency with which we are working: the efficiency enables us to move resources between programs. Although

children in care require more caseworkers, they can come from other areas of service delivery, and we have massively grown family support services in the community sector. They have increased by something like 400 per cent over the last five years, which means a number of cases can move from a child protection intervention to community sector ongoing family support far more rapidly. So we have managed quite well.

Ms L.L. BAKER: In pursuing the issue of caseloads and caseworkers relevant to the growth funding, I wonder if this would be an appropriate time to ask if it is possible to find out the number of caseworkers across the three service areas of the department? Is that a sensible question to ask—how many caseworkers are there across the three service areas?

[9.30 pm]

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: If the member wishes to ask that question, we will get that answer for her. Just give us a couple of minutes to get that detail forward.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Sure; the parliamentary secretary can take it as a supplementary if she wants.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: If we can answer it now, it is a lot easier.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Okay.

Mr T.M. Murphy: I do not think we have that, but we are scrambling through papers as I speak!

Ms L.L. BAKER: I was also wondering how many family resource employees the department is working with at the moment.

Mr T.M. Murphy: I think, if I may, it would be safest to take that on notice with respect both to the allocation of caseworkers across service areas and the raw number of family resource employees.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Just for the 2013-14 year.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: For 2013-14?

Ms L.L. BAKER: Would the parliamentary secretary be prepared to do that?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Yes, certainly. So we are getting the allocation of full-time equivalents across the three areas, and also the family resource workers.

[*Supplementary Information No B29.*]

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: Parliamentary secretary, I refer to the line item “Sustainable Funding and Contracting with the Not-For-Profit Sector—Component II” on page 562 of the *Budget Statements*. An amount of \$6.27 million is allocated in 2013-14, and \$29.5 million over the forward estimates period relating to sustainable funding and contracting with the not-for-profit sector. Can the parliamentary secretary explain what this funding is for and the role the non-government sector plays in providing child protection and family support services in Western Australia? I know Mr Murphy has mentioned a few of these, but I would like a bit of a concise answer on what the not-for-profit organisations do in this area.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: The question is about something I am very confident and very proud of within this sector, the same as with the disability sector and the Mental Health Commission. We are working closely with the not-for-profit sector and certainly strengthening that sector, but also the community involvement does make a great difference to the families and children involved. We currently provide \$145 million for the not-for-profit community services sector, and they provide that support and care for many people who are really the most vulnerable in our community. We have had additional funding of over \$600 million since 2011-12; that was a very important time and we really boosted that not-for-profit sector up. We need to continue with that, and then of course add some more. We had two components to that; as I think was mentioned earlier on in Mental Health, we had component I and component II. Component II has a breakdown, which I will ask Mr Murphy give the member, and then continue on with some of the work they are doing.

Mr T.M. Murphy: The member will remember that component I was a 15 per cent across-the-board increase, which helped the viability of the agencies. The second component is more targeted to sectors that have particular needs. The quantum is, this year, \$6.2 million, rising next year to \$7.45 million, and in 2016-17—the fourth year of the out years—it will be \$8 million. The priorities for our department for that additional funding have been family and domestic violence services, which reflects uneven historical funding between women’s refuges. Some women’s refuges were established on a shoestring and supported strongly by community groups, and really have been run way too lean for too long; whereas others are state-of-the-art and have all the necessary supports that help women not only to be safe in a refuge for a period, but also to get the follow-on help; even more importantly, have adjunct services that keep them safe at home as a preference to coming into a refuge. So family and domestic violence service funding will be used to even up those refuges that are well behind.

We have a very large number of youth workers funded throughout the state that have been, once again, funded on a historical basis very poorly: minimum wages and very small agencies with only two or three workers. The agencies have been prepared to operate on these small amounts of funding, but by boosting those agencies' funding, they will be able to provide a more case management-oriented service, and a more outreach-oriented service. So this is particularly helping when kids are out on the street—rather than them waiting in the centres, being able to go out to them and have some very targeted follow up.

Then there is a general category for regional and remote services, where the sheer cost of living, housing and basics in regional and remote areas has outstripped funding. So there will be some service-specific increases where necessary in regional and remote areas.

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: I have a further question on something the member for Kwinana was talking about—children in care—and something that Mr Murphy mentioned across a total annual budget. I know of several Aboriginal grandmothers in Belmont who mind children, and two amounts were mentioned: there is what the adult gets paid to mind a child, and there is a fee set aside for the child annually for expenses. What amount is that?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Mr Murphy will respond.

Mr T.M. Murphy: I think I am about to be given the accurate answers, as opposed to going with my rounded figures. Of course, it is a complex table. I think it probably would be quite useful if we could table the foster carer subsidy rates.

The CHAIRMAN: Unfortunately, we cannot table things at these things. You can leave it lying on the table, but it is not formally tabled.

Mr T.M. Murphy: I am beyond my brief!

Mr R.H. COOK: Leave it on the table and an attendant might carelessly walk past it, photocopy it a dozen times and come back!

The CHAIRMAN: You are certainly free to pass it over, but we cannot formally table it.

Mr T.M. Murphy: This could be provided to the member. The subsidy rates vary according to the age of the child specifically, and then have different rates for base subsidy, clothes, pocket money and the like.

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: It is a 15-year-old boy.

Mr T.M. Murphy: A 15-year-old boy? That is a basic subsidy of \$600 a fortnight. So it is about \$15 000 a year. That is always the, sort of, rule of thumb I have in mind—it is a bit over.

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: Can I just clarify that? Is that for a child's expenditure solely, not for the carer?

Mr T.M. Murphy: That goes to the carer for the upkeep of the child. So for all issues like, as I said, basic food and care, pocket money, clothes and so on —

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: Excuse me, but that is not what I am talking about.

Mr T.M. Murphy: There is an additional amount of money that the member asked about.

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: That is what I am after.

Mr T.M. Murphy: That is under the heading of “case support costs” that I mentioned earlier, where we anticipated spending an additional \$1 200 000 this year to account for kids in care. That is an average amount of \$5 500 per child.

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: Thanks; that is what I wanted.

Mr T.M. Murphy: That is spent flexibly according to their needs, managed either by ourselves or the community sector agency—whoever has care of the foster carer for the child.

Mr R.H. COOK: Is it all right if we look at that document? Is that okay?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Ms L.L. BAKER: While that is happening, I have a further question.

In relation to the not-for-profit question, parliamentary secretary, I know the department is delegating case management of children in the CEO's care who are on permanent protection orders and in stable long-term placements into the sector. I am just wondering whether the parliamentary secretary can tell me how many of those particular children we have in the system at the moment; so how many have been placed with the NFP sector?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Murphy to respond to that question.

Mr T.M. Murphy: The trial for delegated case management currently involves 18 children in care. It started out with around double that amount identified. One agency, at the last minute, chose not to participate—Yorganop; it is an Aboriginal care agency. Its rationale was, essentially, that it is advantageous to the child and the family if the department has to do some of the hard work, particularly with birth families, and it can work in a less encumbered way with foster families, which is a very fair rationale. The other rationale with the four participating agencies—Wanslea Family Services, Parkerville Children and Youth Care, Anglicare and MercyCare—is that if an agency provides foster care for a child who is in a permanent placement, that agency in fact has most of the contact with the child and draws up an annual plan for the child that covers most matters, so it is both more efficient and more effective for that agency to do the whole job. Both rationales are true, which is why our business is a little complex. The trial is for 18 kids who are on permanent orders with four agencies, and that is probably about two-thirds of the way through. We certainly envisage that as an expanding area.

[9.40 pm]

Ms L.L. BAKER: It sounds like a really interesting trial. I am just worried about not having a specific Aboriginal-focused service provider. It is Yorganop Centrecare, is it not?

Mr T.M. Murphy: No; Yorganop is its own agency. It is the Djooraminda Reunification Service.

Ms L.L. BAKER: How does the parliamentary secretary think we should try to find an Aboriginal agency that is capable of taking up this kind of challenge?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Mr Murphy can give us further information on that.

Mr T.M. Murphy: I do not think we could get a better Aboriginal care agency than Yorganop. It is very professional and very considered in what it does. It has grown steadily over the years, but it has also been very clear that it wants to grow at a pace that it can manage. It is a highly professional, solid agency. It has made a choice based on the difficulties that are inherent in the work—that is, the conflict often between birth families and foster families. It is just an unfortunate reality that that conflict is often heightened in Aboriginal communities. It tends to be compounded by social disadvantage and more profound problems with mental health, drug and alcohol, and domestic violence issues, which are the cause of kids coming into care in the first place.

Ms L.L. BAKER: How does the department deal with that to find a provider?

Mr T.M. Murphy: As I say, Yorganop can grow and we will support its growth at the pace it can grow at. Similarly, Centrecare's Djooraminda is going through quite a strong reform process at the moment to make it a stronger agency. Once again, we will support that agency as much as we can. The only other point I would make is that in regional areas where we have family group homes that have live-in carers contracted to the community sector, it is a requirement for new ones that they partner with an Aboriginal community services agency. We are confident that all of them have some degree of partnership with Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations. We want to formalise that partnership with the newer ones. Over time, we very much hope that the Aboriginal agencies will elect to become providers of those services. It is not quite as simple as saying this in the newspaper.

Mr P.B. WATSON: I refer to the line item for program rationalisation on page 562 of the budget papers. An amount of \$645 000 will come out each year. Can the parliamentary secretary tell me what programs will be rationalised during this process and how this figure was determined?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I thank the member for Albany. Because it is specifically operational, I will ask Mr Murphy to respond to the member on how the department intends to do this.

Mr T.M. Murphy: We, like all agencies, were asked to identify programs that could be rationalised. This is never easy, but it is an essential part of good government to periodically review programs and, when they are not delivering the sorts of aims that we would hope, to be prepared to put that money back in the coffers so that, firstly, the budget can be healthy and, secondly, the money can eventually be used for something else. We will cut back our family crisis program, which provides emergency financial assistance in some areas. As the member indicated, that is \$615 000.

Mr P.B. WATSON: It is \$645 000.

Mr T.M. Murphy: The family crisis program part is \$615 000 of that amount. I will tell the member what the other \$30 000 was for in a moment. With the family crisis program, we will pull out of providing cash on request to people who come to the front door for unforeseen crises such as losing a wallet; furniture removal; a single-event household disaster such as a burnout of all whitegoods; financial assistance for baby formula, which is in the same realm as not having enough cash at a particular time; financial assistance for optical; financial

assistance for health equipment; and a multi-birth allowance. The member will see from those later categories that this is quite a dated program.

Mr P.B. WATSON: But there are more crises in the community at the moment because people cannot afford to pay their bills and things like that. Would the crisis program not be one of the things that the department would retain?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I think there are a couple of avenues that people can go to for certain support at times of different crises.

Mr P.B. WATSON: They are lining up; they cannot get in.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Yes, but this is quite specific to the child protection area, so Mr Murphy may want to continue on that.

Mr T.M. Murphy: I will pick up on the very point of child protection. There is something of a contradiction in the child protection agency providing that financial assistance. It is the case that, although a lot of people come through our front door, some people would rather not. Fortunately, the commonwealth government funds a number of agencies—something like 145 service outlets—to provide \$4.9 million in emergency assistance. They provide purchase vouchers of a fixed value for food, transport, chemists and the like; pay outstanding accounts for rent or utilities; and provide material assistance, household goods, clothing and food parcels, as well as for a flexible range of other needs. We also provide financial counselling services. So our reduction of \$600 000 in expenditure leaves in the provision of these services close to \$5 million provided by the community sector, plus financial counselling assistance. Although some individuals will be temporarily affected, largely through the habit of coming to our service in regional areas, there are very strong alternative services.

Mr P.B. WATSON: What was the other \$30 000 for?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Mr Murphy will respond to that.

Mr T.M. Murphy: The other \$30 000 was for a very dated program called the community-based kindergarten subsidy, which was a grant application program for kindergartens with a high proportion of Aboriginal kids. The \$30 000 involved grants of \$20 000 to three kindergartens.

[9.50 pm]

Mr P.B. WATSON: Would one of those be in Albany?

Mr T.M. Murphy: I do not believe so, member, but I am happy to take that as supplementary information.

Mr P.B. WATSON: I am just wondering if it is Coolangarras Barmah.

Mr T.M. Murphy: I have been corrected: whereas in the past there have been multiple kindergartens such as these, in the last year we have only had one application for \$4 000. In fact this is a program that other funding sources have taken over. It is a small amount. As part of good government, we identified it and let it go.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Out of that \$615 000, what was the demand like in the previous 12 months?

Mr T.M. Murphy: The demand used all of those funds and a little bit more. The member might remember that one of the efficiency cuts we made last year was to take \$600 000 out of that program. It was originally \$1.2 million. In the first year we did not quite achieve those efficiencies, but the demand is trending down as people get used to less funds being available.

Mr R.H. COOK: I have some questions about the second dot point on page 563, which commences, “Recruiting general foster carers”. It reports that a mass media and social media campaign resulted in over 100 additional carers being approved to June 2013. My question is in two sections. The first relates to how much the mass media and social media campaign cost and how was it run. I signal to the Chair that I have some questions to ask about where the new foster carers came from and what sort of foster carers they are. Perhaps we will just deal, in the first instance, with the costs and how the campaign was run.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Before we get into specific areas, the foster care programs and campaigns, the ones I have seen and the people who talk at them—I attended a couple of information sessions for people—were very well done. I know that a number of dedicated people who had not gone into that process before certainly put their hands up to become carers through that process. I am not sure of the outcome of all that. They are certainly very valuable. There is specific information that Mr Murphy has, that I know he would like to provide.

Mr T.M. Murphy: The first thing to say is that the actual advertisements for this campaign were developed on a pro bono basis for the Department for Child Protection and Family Support by The Brand Agency originally for a campaign we ran three years ago. We let about two and a half years elapse before doing it again, which we thought was about the right gestation period. We then spent \$200 000 on a television media buy working with

The Brand Agency, again on a pro bono basis, achieving a two-for-one arrangement. We actually got \$400 000 worth of media retail value for \$200 000. For the first time we ventured into Facebook. To establish that and run it for the first six months cost \$30 000. We are continuing Facebook and Google advertising, which puts us at the top of searches on “foster care” for the next 12 months. That will cost \$14 000.

The campaign has been reasonably successful. Our first campaign three years ago actually netted us 500 new carers, which was critical because a lot of ageing carers were leaving the system. This campaign brought in 842 contacts. The period of consideration, assessment and actual enrolment can be quite extended, at the foster carer’s request, because it is a big life decision. Of those 842, at this stage we have registered 110 additional applicants. Unfortunately, or fortunately, they tend to be a bit geographically concentrated. We have only run in Perth; except for Facebook of course, which is everywhere. Most of them are in Perth. There are fewer in the areas of Mirrabooka and Armadale, which have the highest number of children in care. We have foster carers in the areas of Joondalup, Fremantle and the like. The geographical match-up is not as close as we would like, but given that it is all Perth it is reasonably manageable.

Mr R.H. COOK: How many of these new registered carers are of Aboriginal background?

Mr T.M. Murphy: I do not have that information in front of me but I am pretty confident in saying they are not Aboriginal carers. The reality is that Yorganop recruit all the Aboriginal general carers there are to be recruited. I think that is quite appropriate. Aboriginal families and communities in general are busy being relative carers more often, or looking after extended family in informal arrangements. We actually do not expect to recruit many Aboriginal carers as general carers. We have some, but not many.

Mr R.H. COOK: I assume therefore that what we are talking about here is general carer households rather than relative carer households?

Mr T.M. Murphy: Yes.

Mr R.H. COOK: How many children in care are placed with their grandparents?

Mr T.M. Murphy: It is difficult to be specific about grandparents, but just over 40 per cent of children in care are placed with their own family, in contrast to about 36 per cent or 37 per cent who are placed in general foster care.

Mr R.H. COOK: Does the department know how many grandparents are caring for children who might otherwise be placed in state care?

Mr T.M. Murphy: No; not statistically accurately. There have been estimates made in the past by both our department and the now Department of Local Government and Communities, and on that basis projected expenditure on additional support for those grandparents has been calculated. I do not have those figures now but could track them down obviously as a supplementary.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Can I clarify which part of the question the member wants?

Mr R.H. COOK: I think Mr Murphy referred to the question: does the department know how many grandparents care for children who might otherwise be placed in state care.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will provide supplementary information as to the number of grandparents caring for grandchildren who would otherwise be placed in state care.

[Supplementary Information No B30.]

Mr R.H. COOK: I want to be clear on this. Forgive me, I am using extensive notes and I have a very basic working knowledge of it myself. Are both these groups—Aboriginal grandparent foster households and also general grandparent foster households—eligible for the new grant scheme that people have been referring to?

Mr T.M. Murphy: Through our department, only relatives looking after children who are in the care of the state, or in the care of the CEO under the legislation, are eligible for the foster care subsidy. However, a number of other families come to our attention and we work with them. We will support, and in some cases facilitate, families making their own arrangements, temporarily usually; sometimes it may be more long lasting. Where the department has been involved in facilitating such a family arrangement, we will provide a grant of \$1 000 to that family to establish whatever they may need to make that transition easier. We will also provide financial assistance on an ad hoc basis to that family if necessary. We may support them to go to the Family Court for a Family Court arrangement.

The CHAIRMAN: Mr Murphy, unfortunately the time has expired.

The appropriation was recommended.

Committee adjourned at 10.00 pm

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 21 August 2013]

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Ms Lisa Baker; Ms Andrea Mitchell; Mr Roger Cook; Mrs Glenys Godfrey; Mr Peter Watson
