

Mr Sean L'Estrange; Ms Simone McGurk; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Mia Davies; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski; Mr Yaz Mubarakai; Ms Cassandra Rowe; Chair

Division 33: Communities — Services 1 to 10, Child Protection; Women's Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services, \$786 480 000 —

Mr I.C. Blayney, Chair.

Ms S.F. McGurk, Minister for Child Protection; Women's Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services.

Mr G. Searle, Director General.

Ms. J. Tang, Assistant Director General, Child Protection and Family Support.

Mr B. Jolly, Assistant Director General, Commissioning and Sector Engagement.

Mr L. Carren, Executive Director, Business Services.

Mr. S. Hollingworth, Executive Director, Housing and Homelessness.

Ms T. Pritchard, Director, Finance.

Mr D. Settelmaier, Senior Policy Adviser.

Ms C. Irwin, Chief of Staff, Minister for Child Protection.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the Chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information she agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by Friday, 1 June 2018. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

The Member for Churchlands has the call.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I refer to the line item "Total appropriations provided to deliver services" in the table on page 415 of budget paper No 2. I refer also to the first and last dot points on page 417, which link to that. The first states —

... serious financial hardship increases the likelihood of adverse social consequences ...

The second states —

... the developmental status of children in communities with socio-economic disadvantage has improved only marginally in recent years.

Can the minister explain why the government is reducing funding, given the reduction in appropriations over the forward estimates? Will the minister provide a breakdown by line item of the reductions represented over these forward estimates?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Just to be clear, is the member referring to the dot points on page 417, which are about the national partnership agreement on remote housing and the number of individuals and families facing serious financial hardship?

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I am picking up on some of the government's comments about significant issues impacting the industry, and I am particularly interested in some aspects of those dot points. I will read them again. The first states —

... serious financial hardship increases the likelihood of adverse social consequences ...

The second states —

... the developmental status of children in communities with socio-economic disadvantage has improved only marginally ...

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It is in that context that I am asking why the government is reducing funding in the appropriations over the forward estimates and whether the minister can provide a breakdown by line item of those reductions over the forward estimates.

Ms S.F. McGURK: As the member would appreciate, the Department of Communities, as a result of the machinery-of-government changes, incorporates the portfolio responsibilities of a number of ministers. That includes me with child protection and family support, communities, women's interests and the prevention of family and domestic violence. Minister Dawson has responsibility for disability services and Minister Tinley has responsibility for housing. Those total appropriations include all the areas of responsibility under the Department of Communities. The biggest material changes relate to the transition of the National Disability Insurance Scheme in Western Australia. I do not know whether the member was present in the estimates that went through disabilities, but that line item obviously relates to that ministerial portfolio. Another significant change is that the voluntary separation scheme has had an impact. That has occurred across government and there has been some reduction in funding for that. In my areas of responsibility, there are changes to the cost-and-demand model for child protection and families services—there are increases for that—early intervention and family support, the hardship utility grant scheme, salaries and the like. Those changes are incorporated in those total line items. In addition are decreases that relate to the national rental affordability scheme, which comes under the Minister for Housing's responsibilities.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I thank the minister for clarifying the machinery-of-government changes impacting on the ability to get down and look at the discretionary aspects of this budget. I am happy to take this now or as a supplementary information, but for the minister's specific responsibilities—she mentioned some of them, such as child protection and early intervention and family support—and those types of community funding arrangements, is the minister able to provide us with a breakdown of the 2018–19 budget and the forward estimates for each service that the minister's portfolio is responsible for so that we can see whether funding allocated to these specific services is increasing or decreasing?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is outlined throughout the budget papers. The member may understand that throughout the budget papers before us are a number of different line items and they relate either to child protection responsibilities or a whole heap of different individual activities under my portfolio responsibilities in the department. If the member looks at page 420, for instance, under "Service Summary", that will give him an idea of a number of different items. Not all those relate to my portfolio but certainly the first 10 or so do. If the member looks at any one of those items, he will see that the appropriation for the vast majority of them are increasing. There was acceptance throughout the negotiations held between the then Department for Child Protection and Family Support and Treasury for the need to understand the demands that are on the child protection system and that that should be built into an arrangement of increased funding need. That was a recommendation from the Ford review in, I think, 2007. As a result of the Ford review into child protection, that acknowledgement of the need for a cost and demand model has been in place for some time. Those responsibilities are now built into the way that Child Protection's funding is negotiated through Treasury.

[2.10 pm]

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The minister mentioned that the top 10 or so expenses listed on page 420 of budget paper No 2 in the table "Service Summary" are mainly to do with her portfolios, the others may not be. Is anything in the minister's portfolios not listed in that table?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The whole budget is listed there in the service line items. Expenses 1 to 10 are definitely mine. That should be all. Most of them should be specified within those items. I am thinking of Women's Interests, but I think that is covered there in terms of grants et cetera. They should all be included within expenses 1 to 10 of those service line items.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I refer to expense 8, "Regulation and Support of the Early Education and Care Sector". I notice that \$17 million was budgeted in 2017–18, but, for this budget, rounded up, it is \$15 million. That is a drop of \$2 million in the budget. It drops by almost a further \$1 million in 2019–20 and stabilises at about that figure throughout the out years. There is a drop of \$2 million and another drop of \$1 million. Between the 2017–18 budget and the 2019–20 budget, there is a drop of \$3 million. Can the minister explain why she has done that?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There were a couple of reasons. One reason was there was some funding from royalties for regions for the regional community childcare development fund. That is incorporated in there. I am sure the member will remember that a couple of questions were asked in the Legislative Assembly about the regional community childcare development fund, and I think it was also raised by the Leader of the National Party during a recent matter of public interest. The fund was used to look at how we could have a sustainable model for the delivery of child care or early education care in regional areas in which the population is such that it can be quite challenging to maintain

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small centres. The one that I am most familiar with is the model that was developed in the wheatbelt. We launched that in Narrogin not long ago. A number of individual services that are essentially not-for-profit or community-based services are auspiced under a general committee that holds the accreditation for those services and helps manage them. That was funded through royalties for regions and was always going to be finite. It was simply put in place to look for a model that would be sustainable. There is that one in the wheatbelt, and there is one in the south west, which is under a slightly different model. That was put in place in July 2016. As I said, it was a finite project. We have just discovered in the federal budget that there are some federal government variations. Work was done on the national childcare accreditation guidelines, and the federal government was funding some of that. That has now been cut. That might be incorporated in those particular items as well.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: With regard to the delivery of services under expense 8, “Regulation and Support of the Early Education and Care Sector”, will that \$3 million reduction result in a reduction in service delivery?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No. In fact the work of the early childhood regulatory unit is very good. Officers from the unit visit all long day care centres once a year. After-school-hours care and family day care has been an area in which it is harder to get out to all services, but it is endeavouring to do that work and get out to centres. As the member can imagine, it is an area that needs close scrutiny to make sure that standards are maintained. No, there is no expectation that those reductions will result in a change in service delivery. I have just been given a note that the commonwealth funding reduction is \$1.5 million as a result of funding that had come from the federal government to help with standards accreditation work, but that is no longer there for us.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The minister said the reduction in commonwealth funding is \$1.5 million. Does that mean the minister has matched that with a state reduction in funding of \$1.5 million?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It was not required to be matched.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I am saying in terms of a reduction. The commonwealth has pulled out \$1.5 million and there is a \$3 million drop from 2017–18 to 2019–20 in the state budget. Is the minister saying that the commonwealth has pulled out \$1.5 million of that \$3 million and the state has pulled out \$1.5 million of its own?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No; I also said part of that reduction is the royalties for regions money that came from the regional community childcare development fund.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Is the minister saying that the other \$1.5 million is in another budget?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No. I am saying that the reduction in the line item that the member identified, “Regulation and Support of the Early Education and Care Sector”, incorporates that those reductions are as a result of money no longer being available for the regional community childcare development fund, and also money that was taken away by the commonwealth government in its accreditation work, which had previously been given to us.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer the minister to page 420 of budget paper No 2 and expense 10, “Delivery of Community Services, Grants and Resources”. I note that there is a reduction going forward from 2018–19 into the forward estimates from \$53.941 million to \$49.397 million. Given the increased demand on this sector, can the minister please explain why there is a reduction in the amount of funds dedicated to this area?

Ms S.F. McGURK: In answer to the member’s question, two items are incorporated. One is that the decrease is mainly driven by the Aboriginal community patrols program, which was only ever allocated funding for a limited time. In the past, that has gone to Treasury for reconsideration through the state budget process. That is something that the future budget process will incorporate. The other change in that expenditure is as a result of the capital works related to our election commitment of \$1.5 million for the community of Dalyellup to provide a community facility in the form of a neighbourhood centre or some sort of central community location at which people can meet. Dalyellup is a growing area. The member is probably familiar with the area; she probably drives past it on her way to Perth. It is a growing community. The geography of that community means it has some facilities near the beach and the surf club and the like, but in areas where the number of houses has grown there is not much community infrastructure. In the state election campaign, Labor made a commitment to allocate \$1.5 million to the development of a community facility, and that has been allocated, but it is only a one-off payment. It is not reflected in the forward estimates.

[2.20 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I would like to understand the minister’s comments about the Aboriginal community patrols. She said that the cuts made to that area would be addressed in a future budget process. Can the minister explain that further, and where she expects to see funding for this area, going forward?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The department is expected to look at its own service model, particularly under the machinery-of-government changes, so there are opportunities there that, in the first instance, are probably being realised most fulsomely in the Kimberley, where we are genuinely trying to bring together the Department of

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Communities, the frontline work of the Disability Services Commission, notwithstanding the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and the previous work of child protection and communities, to provide better integration with the community and with vulnerable families. Those changes in service delivery will have an impact, and we might then be able to look at how some of those services, such as the night patrols, work in practice. Efficiencies might be realised through changes in the way the department operates. The patrols are currently delivered by a number of non-government organisations. I do not think there is any question that it is important work and, anecdotally, there will be an ongoing need for that work to be done. I do not think there will be any disagreement with that. My understanding is that the funding for this has not been reflected in forward estimates over successive governments.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify, when does the funding for the Aboriginal community patrols run out? Does it run out in 2018–19?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is just funded into 2018–19.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify, how much funding is dedicated to this area?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The allocation is \$6.35 million.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to confirm, there appears to be no future funding beyond 2019–20 in any other portfolio for Aboriginal community patrols.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The Aboriginal community patrols program is funded by the Department of Communities to do that particular function. That is the line item the member is looking at. As I said, my understanding is that the nature of the program has been that it has not been funded into the forward estimates in the past. I am very conscious that it does good work, and that we would not be able to continue it into the future.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the line item for the senior executive service under “Spending Changes” on page 415. Can the minister identify each position that has been made redundant, contributing to the savings?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Of all the opportunities for efficiencies in the machinery-of-government changes, the Department of Communities gives us the best opportunity for not only efficiencies but also, more importantly, better service delivery to communities, particularly vulnerable communities. I gave the example of the Kimberley before. Some of those communities pose real challenges in providing good, consistent, coordinated services. I think the machinery-of-government changes are good for service delivery, but there are also some logical efficiencies in bringing together big departments such as Child Protection and Family Support, and Housing. There was a commitment across government for a reduction in the senior executive service by 20 per cent. That has been achieved in the Department of Communities. The budget reduction associated with that was \$9 million from 2017–18 to 2021–22. They are the savings that were realised. Some questions were asked in the Assembly about some of the positions that had gone from Child Protection and Family Support, and there had been some public discussion about those. Emma White was the previous director general of Child Protection and Family Support, and she decided to resign from the service when the machinery-of-government changes occurred, as did people in other SES positions in child protection.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister identify each of the positions that have been made redundant?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is difficult to talk about the positions when the whole structure of the department has now changed. The savings in Communities related to 15 positions in the SES across the Department of Communities. In Child Protection and Family Support, the Housing Authority and the Disability Services Commission, the number of positions was reduced. In the Disability Services Commission, the impact of the NDIS gave us an opportunity to look again at how the department was organised.

Ms L. METTAM: Perhaps an easier way of asking this is: how many positions formerly within the Department for Child Protection and Family Support have been made redundant?

Ms S.F. McGURK: SES positions?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Seven.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the member able to identify those positions?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The positions were those of director general, held by Emma White, as I said; three executive directors; a general manager of human resources; and a director of finance and business services.

[2.30 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: Have any new positions been created to fulfil the responsibilities of these previous positions that were made redundant; and, if so, can the minister detail what those new positions are, and their remuneration levels?

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Ms S.F. McGURK: Under the current department, we would have to look at the changes that have occurred across three previously significant departments and all of the Communities functions. Remember, we are talking about the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, the Housing Authority, the Disability Services Commission and the Communities functions of the former Department of Local Government and Communities. I have outlined that 15 senior executive service positions were abolished as a result of machinery-of-government changes, and they in turn met our overall government election commitment to reduce SES positions by 20 per cent within that department. We did not just cobble together those departments. The whole structure of the department has changed, so I do not think I can answer that question. Those positions were made redundant, so no, there are not new positions. I do not know whether the member is using the title or the work being carried out; some of the work that was carried out will be carried out by other people, but not by new positions.

Ms L. METTAM: I am happy to take it as a supplementary question. Given that positions have been made redundant within the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, I would imagine that there is some structure and I imagine that the information would be available to outline what the new responsibilities or new positions are that now fulfil those roles. Is there any opportunity for some information to be provided by supplementary information?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We can refer the member to the annual report; I would be happy to do that. But, again, it is important to appreciate that we had 57 positions across the whole department and we are now down to 42. We are working towards that change across all the regions and the metro area. There has been a complete change in the structure of the department. I cannot say that there would be an ability to outline the SES positions that are picking up the work that was done by those previous positions, if that is what is being asked. I refer the member to the annual report. We might have a copy of the annual report here and I am certainly happy to give the member a copy of it. It outlines the structure of the department and the change process to date in the previous report, which has been tabled, and in the one that will be tabled in the third quarter of this year.

Ms L. METTAM: Are there any existing positions that are now fulfilling the responsibilities of the previous positions that were made redundant? Are some people taking on additional roles as a result of the machinery-of-government changes?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is the member talking about just SES positions?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: As I said, we are talking about 57 positions down to 42 and, yes, some of those people who are left are picking up the roles of people who were made redundant under the reduction of the SES as a result of the machinery-of-government changes. Yes, I would say that there are, but for an organisation that has, I think, 5 500 people working for it and a significant strata of 45 people in SES positions, it is too simplistic to say that someone was made redundant and someone else has picked up a quarter or half of their job. The nature of change as a result of the machinery-of-government changes in Communities is that there has been a change of structure within the department. Importantly, I think that is better for service delivery and, as a happy coincidence, some efficiencies will be delivered to government. Those are the sorts of efficiencies we are proud of. We had too many government departments in Western Australia; there is no doubt about that—41 government departments overall. We are now down to 25. If we compare that with Victoria and New South Wales, which have something like eight and nine departments respectively, it shows what an absurdly large number of departments we had. Not only was there a large number of departments, but I also emphasise that by bringing together the previously separate departments and separate service efforts that went towards what is now under the Department of Communities, the opportunities for a much more cohesive effort for particularly vulnerable and challenging communities, families and individuals are, I think, very exciting. It is still very challenging work, but it is a very exciting development and one that I hope to progress for as long as I am in this job.

Ms L. METTAM: To be clear, I am not talking about the thousands of staff members, I am talking about the senior executive staff. I ask a further question: will additional remuneration be provided to the existing positions that are taking on additional responsibilities?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Again, if the member looks at the number of SES positions that are left under the new structure of the department, she will see that there has been a change in positions and in the profile of those SES positions. Any changes to the job descriptions or the classifications need to go through the Public Sector Commission. I am not aware that, as a result of any of the redundancies that occurred, any extra duties were then picked up by existing or remaining staff, or that they picked up a reclassification or salary increase as a result. As I said, there has been a restructure within the department as a whole to properly integrate those previous functions within the separate departments. That is the sort of change within the department that I welcome and that the government welcomes,

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because it was not just a matter of cobbling together three or four previously disparate organisations, but actually properly integrating them to achieve efficiencies and benefits of service.

Ms L. METTAM: By way of supplementary information, can an organisational chart be provided?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is still in the process of being worked through within the department. As I said, the annual report as it was tabled late last year will outline the structure of the Department of Communities. The next annual report is just starting to be prepared and will be tabled in October, I think. That will provide a fulsome outline of the structure of the new department. I suggest that the member just be patient and have a look at what is incorporated into the new structure through the annual report process.

[2.40 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: Why is there no organisational chart at this point in time, given, I would hope, we have already gone through the machinery-of-government changes? I find it surprising that a new organisational chart of the new department is not available.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Certainly a structure is being worked through now with the appointment of the new director general, and I think it occurred in the first quarter of this year, by the time we were finally able to properly appoint that position and then work through what organisational structure was needed in the Department of Communities to best realise it. As I said, the first priorities have been better service delivery and efficiencies. The approval process for the new positions has gone to the Public Sector Commission and has either been approved or is in the process of being approved. The structure will be finalised through the clarification of those senior executive service positions, and the senior levels of the department will go through the Public Sector Commission. There is an organisational structure now. I do not mean to give the impression that it is a fluid situation; it is not. The member was asking about specific positions and what roles have been picked up amongst 40-odd people and it is not possible for me to give that level of detail here, and some of those positions are jointly covered across the department.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Based on the answer the minister gave, I would have thought that 40 people is really not much more than a classroom of kids, and it would be possible just to write down their names, job titles, the description of that job title and their salaries. That is all we really want to know so that when we critique the budget or try to understand what the machinery-of-government changes are, at least for the minister's department, we have a greater understanding of who is doing what, where they sit in the organisation and how much they are being paid.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I want to get clear what I am being asked about in terms of my ministerial responsibilities and what line item is being referred to in the budget.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I can clarify the line item. Correct me if I am wrong, member for Vasse, but I believe we are referring to page 415 and the line item "Senior Executive Service Reduction" under "Election Commitments". That is the line item that is the subject of questioning. As the member for Vasse has made very clear from the outset, we are trying to ascertain how that reduction is being achieved. As part of the line of questioning linked to that, we are asking the minister to show us the organisation structure—to show us who the SES are and what they do under the minister.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am happy to provide a structure of the department showing the senior corporate roles and what falls within those roles.

The CHAIR: We just have to —

Ms S.F. McGURK: Before we progress that, Chair, I was speaking to the director general and he might be able to assist with this. Before we do that, we could ask the director general to explain what the new structure looks like.

Mr G. Searle: With the new structure we are fundamentally going to a locality and regional-based model. In the previous structure it was about particular disciplines, but it is now about location-based decision-making. As a result, the structure is totally different from what went before it. We have also consolidated the finance, human resources and information technology functions across the department, and those things have been integrated so there is one. When we started, we ran four separate finance systems; we are now down to three, and we are trying to work our way down to one, hopefully, at the end of the day. Those sorts of changes have already started. In order to get our SES positions and structure approved, we had to go through the Public Sector Commission, because it approves all the SES positions in terms of structure, classification and remuneration rates. That has been an ongoing debate. We got interim approval last week for that new structure, but there is still some work to be done. We have negotiated with people in existing jobs for transfers in like-to-like jobs, so people have stayed at the same classification, and we have negotiated with them that they are happy with the arrangement and what is

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involved. We still have one position on the second tier to fill and that will be advertised this Saturday, I hope, if the system works. Again, at the third tier we are transferring like for like, so when people are doing an equivalent job at an equivalent level, we are transferring them across. When there are significant changes, we have agreement from the Public Sector Commission to re-score the positions and allocate the classifications and therefore the salaries that flow from those. That process literally commenced last week when I got the interim approval. We think that the full population of the structure and therefore who is in what job will take a little while yet because there are a whole lot of advertising and recruitment processes to go through. The net effect of the changes will be to go from 57 positions to 42, so we are delivering an overall headcount reduction of 15 in the SES and we are delivering the dollar savings proposed by the incumbent government as part of that process. At this exact point in time we cannot list the names against each of those jobs because we are in the process of transitioning from one to the other, so it is not a like-for-like comparison.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I thank the director general for explaining that. Are we able to get the current status of people in these positions, be they acting, so at the very least we have a sense of what the structure looks like? I imagine that the job descriptions are probably going to be the same even though the people might be moving. We are interested in the positions the department is trying to achieve.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The director general's explanation might show why I was a little reluctant to give that information, because things are in the process of changing. After 1 July, there will be a very definite structure within the department. By bringing together those previous departments, as the director general said, we will have common HR, finance and IT functions, for instance, but we will be working to a regional structure and, when we can, looking at a fundamentally changed structure. We have given the numbers of SES positions that have changed and the numbers of people in those positions who I have responsibility for in child protection out of the SES reduction. I suggest that after 1 July when we have those approvals through the Public Sector Commission I will be happy to answer those questions about what the structure looks like. There has been a process of change in the machinery of government; there is no doubt about that. It has been a challenge within the department as people continue to do the work on the ground, particularly in areas I have responsibility for such as child protection, with the changes occurring at a higher level in the department.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister talked about the shift to a more regional-based model. Can the minister expand on that and how the regions would be determined under the new model?

[2.50 pm]

Ms S.F. McGURK: The regions are pretty well known. We have regional offices now. Earlier I gave an example about the Kimberley, where that work has commenced. If we can have people co-located in the same offices, we will do that. If we can have the same front-of-house or front counter staff, we will do that. That can be a challenge sometimes, depending on the officers themselves. In the example of the Kimberley, I think it gives a proper integration of the department. It gives an opportunity for staff who were previously working as Department of Housing staff dealing with some of the vulnerable cohort. Not all of the Department of Housing cohorts are challenging by any means, but some of them are. There are behavioural issues and even to the extent of understanding how many people are living in a house, and making sure that the child protection and communities workers, for instance, also have that same information and are then integrating with those families in a much more coordinated way. In the work we are doing with early intervention in child protection, we have just announced some of those programs out of the state budget; for instance, Target 120, which is a juvenile justice early intervention program. Some of this work had been done under the previous government in child protection for early intervention, whereby we try to direct resources to support families, for the children. The situation is such that the children come under the care of the chief executive officer and the like. We can do that in a more integrated way across those areas, particularly in housing, but perhaps even being informed by the disability local area coordinator structure, which has been popular in Western Australia, to really have local officers who then work with those individual families to determine what is required to best meet the issues they are facing.

To answer the question, the regional development commission boundaries will essentially be those that we are looking at from a regional point of view. Obviously for somewhere like the Kimberley, there are West Kimberley officers and East Kimberley officers. That occurs now with Child Protection or Housing. Even Disability Services has officers in all those areas. There is an opportunity to bring those together in a much more integrated way to deal with the families and communities themselves. It is a real opportunity for state government.

Ms L. METTAM: Are there any plans to close any of the existing child protection offices? The minister mentioned potentially partnering with Disability Services. We have just had the closure of the department of disability services in Margaret River. Are there any plans to close any of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support offices in regional Western Australia or in Western Australia?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Following a little from that line of questioning in relation to the rolling out of that integrated model and doing it on a regional basis, is there a prioritisation of which regions will come after the Kimberley and a time line that goes with that rollout?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not know whether this is what the member wants to hear, but I think it will probably go Kimberley, Pilbara and goldfields and then down to either the south west or great southern areas after that by March next year. There are benefits in working through one region and understanding what the challenges are there and what works and what does not. That will be different in each region, but people will get some experience under their belt of what this means. Physically it might mean different things. I know that in some locations there will be more opportunity to physically co-locate staff. The feedback I get from communities is that that would be welcomed and that people get confused about where they are supposed to go. The bureaucracy sometimes barely makes sense to us. I imagine that as a community member it can get a bit confusing. I think that would be welcomed by people. Then there are leases and the like, so that needs to be worked through.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Firstly, is the integrated model mostly around the physical location of the staff? Obviously there are service changes as well. Secondly, the minister mentioned March next year for the first tranche. Will the remainder be beyond then?

Ms S.F. McGURK: In answer to the first question, no, it is not just physical coordination, although there are statutory responsibilities, certainly in child protection. I have been keen to ensure that those obligations are not lost in the new model. I think there is an opportunity for early intervention work and for looking at different models. The example of the local area coordinators in disability getting to know the area, getting to know their families and brokering the services that are required is a good model. To answer the question, no, it is not just physical, although we have seen in my portfolio a range of examples that when services are co-located, we get greater than the sum of their parts. An example is the George Jones Child Advocacy Centre that is run by Parkerville in Armadale. The centre deals with children who have experienced child sex abuse. Co-located in that one centre are child protection officers and police and, in this case, not-for-profit counsellors and the like. The children and their families go to one place and tell their story once, and all the services wrap around those families. That has been assessed as a very successful model, not only because the obviously very vulnerable cohort does not have to navigate their way through lots of different offices and they have to tell their story only once, but also, importantly, because the disciplines start to influence each other. The police who were initially reluctant to co-locate there now sit alongside the child protection officers and therapists and the like and they start to understand a little about disciplines outside their own. They still have a job to do. That is just one example. There are other areas where we see that co-location of services can be a good thing. It is not just co-location of offices, but where we can, it is about bringing together the interaction with families and the way we do business, particularly with early intervention, given that some of those areas are statutory obligations, but we should not take away from the specialists who are needed in child protection.

I have forgotten the second part of the member's question, sorry.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister said that the Kimberley, Pilbara, goldfields and south west would be rolled out by March next year. Can the minister complete the list for us? Obviously, I am the member for Central Wheatbelt. I feel as though we are a difficult area to service and we probably do not have a concentration of the community that the department serves, and because we are a hard-to-service area, we get left behind sometimes, a bit like the childcare model that the minister talked about earlier.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I assume that it will all be done next financial year. The director general is telling me to be cautious about what I promise there. It is easy for me to say! It might take 18 months for that to be rolled out. There are benefits in some of the regional areas. Currently, we have people operating quite separately.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: No question about that; it is just a prioritisation.

[3.00 pm]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, that is right.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: As the member for Central Wheatbelt, I am being selfish because we tend to come down the list since we are a hard-to-service area, with a small population spread over a large area. I think that is why we end up with these challenges in childcare and aged-care provision, and probably the other services. I am not sure it means we have any less need. That is part of the challenge.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Some of the needs of communities in the member's electorate have come to my attention and I think there are real opportunities there. At the same time as they do not have the economies of scale we get with

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population centres, there is a very active community, including volunteering, and different service providers operate in and out of there. If we can bring together some of those efforts, there might be opportunities.

Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI: Over the last few months, I have been keenly watching the situation in Roebourne. I refer to line item 7, “Support Services for Children in the CEO’s Care” on page 420. Can the minister please outline how these services are being delivered in the west Pilbara, particularly around the town of Roebourne?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, I can. I have received a number of questions about Roebourne, particularly from members of the Legislative Council. The opposition spokesperson for child protection has been particularly interested in any assurances I can give regarding vulnerable children in Roebourne and the areas around it. I have certainly tried to give him the message, which I will give here and have given to the public, that I understand the responsibilities very well to at-risk children and in how we make sure that we properly respond to concerns and put support in place where it is needed. It is now on the public record that the police did an operation, Operation Fledermaus, which uncovered a very concerning number of child sex abuse cases in not just Roebourne but also the surrounding community. A reasonable number of the population there is transient, moving in and out of communities or even from Roebourne to Karratha and as far as Hedland. How do we respond to that?

Our first priorities were the safety of the children who were identified either as victims or as at risk of being victims of sexual abuse, to make sure that there was a proper and immediate assessment of that risk and, if necessary, to put protective measures in place. That effort has been ongoing in Roebourne and the surrounding communities. We continue to do that. We have put more resources into the child protection effort with more specialist staff and people on the ground who can then understand and work with families. They make sure that they have good relationships with the families who live in and around that community. Credit goes to not only the child protection workers but also the police who have put in quite a bit of work getting to know the community. As a result of police and child protection workers living in the community, they developed relationships with young people and their families such that people could come forward to disclose information to the extent that they did.

There was an immediate response. How do we then build the understanding of the primacy of child safety and its non-negotiable aspect, and also build that capacity within the community? That has been the other aspect of work we have been doing. Our response is called the west Pilbara trauma response plan. We knew that some initiatives within the community meant people were trying to impress on the rest of the population the cultural rules that should apply in Roebourne. The rules might apply to everything from people attending school, going to work and how elders should be treated to making sure that they had a safe place for their kids to sleep at night. Those cultural rules are part of our plan and build on the work that had already commenced within the community. The west Pilbara plan has a range of different elements. Some of the community rebuild work is ongoing. I imagine that people are like me; they understand that some towns have had a reputation of challenging behaviour for many years, either because of what has occurred in the community or what has been done to them. Roebourne would be chief amongst them in Western Australia.

I think that having meaningful work for people in the community and an expectation of jobs is also key to this, and that is challenging for remote communities in particular. Roebourne is not a remote community—it is only half an hour from Karratha—but there is no ongoing work in the town. I guess the “mining curse”, as it is known, is playing out there where there is the wealth of the resources industry and the natural resources that some Aboriginal people have claim to under native title. However, the intergenerational issues—partly trauma and partly challenge—that have occurred there continue to play out.

I have had conversations with the head of the Pilbara Development Commission, who I think has some really interesting ideas about how we might deal with employment in the area. It is not my primary portfolio responsibility, but dealing with all these issues in Roebourne and what we are hoping to do in the west Pilbara is part of our response. Getting kids to school and keeping them at school—there is currently a low attendance rate—is important, as is making sure that there is an expectation of getting a meaningful job after people finish school or training. That is as important as ensuring that kids have somewhere safe to go at night. As well as the efforts in child protection, it is important to make sure that we map out the kids there and their families so we know what is happening with that population. It is also important to make sure that they have somewhere safe to go, so we have organised 10 safe houses. They will not be like refuges—they will not be staffed. They will be existing houses, which may be given some extra resources. For instance, some of the women told us that kids end up staying in their houses and they are happy to have them, but there ends up being a lot of kids and they just cannot physically fit too many more and they cannot feed them all. Some of those women might be moved to a bigger house or given some assistance so that kids can stay safe. We are also making sure that we support the work of the police and community youth centre for example. I think that is important. Culturally appropriate healing, as esoteric as that might sound, is really important because a connection to a strong expression of culture for Aboriginal people is, I think, going to be central to lasting and ongoing change for these communities.

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[3.10 pm]

Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI: Can the minister outline for me whether the machinery-of-government changes have been helpful in implementing the West Pilbara plan?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes—that is for all the reasons that I earlier outlined when we were talking about the Department of Communities. Because we are operating on a bigger scale within the Department of Communities, I think we can apply a more sophisticated approach to this vulnerable cohort. One area within the Department of Communities is what was known as the regional services reform unit. Grahame Searle, who is sitting alongside me, headed that unit and was doing some of that genuinely integrated work with the leadership in the communities. For instance, at one of the meetings I went to in the East Kimberley, the heads of education, health, police, child protection, housing, as well as some of the not-for-profits, were all sitting around together, working on the common issues of priority and how to focus government. The machinery-of-government changes have been crucial to that within the Department of Communities, but I think there is an understanding within government that there are some whole-of-government targets and that we need much more coordinated whole-of-government effort across services, in partnership with not-for-profits, the community and the federal government. The federal government is as frustrated as anyone, I think, in some of these areas. This might mean we have the ability to make an impression and make change, and at the moment that is just not the case; we are more separate than not. The West Pilbara plan is an integrated plan that includes police, mental health, drug and alcohol and education. They are part of this plan. They have signed up to do things differently, as we have with Target 120 and the early years initiatives. I think that is a really important part of some of the initiatives that the McGowan government is looking at.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to funding for item 6, “Care Arrangements for Children in the CEO’s Care”. I note that compared with the forward estimates in last year’s budget —

Ms S.F. McGURK: Excuse me, member; is that on page —

The CHAIR: I think this is a new question; it is not really a follow-on question.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay.

The CHAIR: I will come back to you in a couple of minutes.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I refer to the line item “Target 120” on page 415 of budget paper No 2. A total of \$20.48 million has been allocated over the four years of the budget for the Target 120 program, which I understand is a scheme to target the most prolific 120 juvenile offenders and their families to help turn lives around and reduce the rate of offending in the community. That equates to about \$170 000 per juvenile offender. Can the minister outline how that money will be spent and how the program will turn around the lives of the most prolific 120 juvenile offenders?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Target 120 is a commitment we took to the state election. The targeting of 120 children is the result of the police telling us that they can tell in advance the kids who are more likely than not to be in and out of Banksia Hill Detention Centre, and who will graduate, if you like, to the adult corrections system. I have heard not only police at a senior level say that, but also local officers said it to me when we first announced Target 120 in Bunbury after the state budget. We were there with an acting superintendent, I think he was, who said he can absolutely tell the kids in the Bunbury community most likely to end up in the juvenile justice system. It is an early intervention program. The model is that a service broker, if you like, will work with the identified children and their families. The service broker will then help coordinate the effort required across other agencies. For instance, those kids might need more assistance to stay at school or one of their parents has a mental health or drug and alcohol problem that has not been addressed properly. There might be housing issues or overcrowding in their house, or very likely a combination of all those things. A relationship will be developed with those kids and their families to try to stop the cycle of those kids escalating their juvenile offending. I read that WA has high rates of juvenile justice reoffending. I do not have those figures in front of me, but the level of juvenile justice reoffending is high and we certainly have a high number of Aboriginal kids reoffending. It is something like 70 per cent in Banksia Hill. Building up the capacity of Aboriginal-controlled organisations to partner with us in that work is important. For the first time we have dedicated resources and a plan to try to work with kids before they end up in Banksia Hill.

The idea is not directed at the cohort of kids in Banksia Hill; it is for kids who have made sort of a foray into juvenile justice and may have some community corrections orders or have come before the police. The director general can tell some of these stories, but we gave a case study to the media in Bunbury and Armadale. The first two sites will be Bunbury and Armadale, then we will roll it out to other communities. There was a real-life example of a young person who was born into domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse, and his mum had

mental health problems. He first came before child protection when he was three. He attended kindy, but missed the whole of preschool and half of grade 1. His dad was in and out of prison. The child spent some time living with his grandmother and was reunited with his mum when he was nine, but by 11 he regularly used alcohol, was starting to move into drugs—probably marijuana—and had started to have some contact with police and the like. By 14, he had been into Banksia Hill, and by 16, he was a father and in and out of Banksia Hill. By 18, he had been in Banksia Hill nine times. We used his real-life example. Think about all the government agencies that had come into contact with him, including child protection. Obviously, the mental health system had completely failed his mother. He missed preschool and most of grade 1, so when he was old enough to go into grade 2 he was likely to be incredibly disengaged. We know that some of the not-for-profits—including Save the Children in Armadale—are doing work on a youth partnership project and working with some of these kids. The model is to really develop a relationship with the kids and their families, who have to agree to be part of this project, and give them one caseworker from a not-for-profit who will work with them to try to keep them at school and address some of the issues they are dealing with. When I was speaking with Save the Children the other day as part of the Youth Partnership Project in Armadale, it gave the example of a couple of kids it is working with. It has got one kid's school attendance up threefold. It has massively increased his school attendance as a result of just starting to understand the overcrowding in his house—he did not have a bed—and all sorts of issues. It is a much more integrated approach.

The other thing I will mention that I think is worthwhile, from which I am hoping we can really start to learn some lessons, is that we have partnered with Treasury on this project to properly understand the cost benefits of spending money on early intervention as distinct from the alternative, which is that those kids are likely to end up in Banksia Hill Detention Centre, and the expense of that is well known. We talk about early intervention being a cheap and more cost-effective approach, but we in government do not really understand that in a deep way. We need to make proper use of the data to track the efforts and determine how much that effort is costing, knowing what the alternative would be and what that would cost government. I imagine that when the member for Churchlands was in government, the big expenses in government were adult corrections and child protection. They are two of the growing areas in government expenditure. This is an attempt to try to stop that growth and, hopefully, get much better social outcomes for those kids.

[3.20 pm]

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I suppose this question particularly relates to the example the minister gave when she more or less mentioned the catalyst that led to the Target 120 program being created. The minister referred to the boy who missed out on all of kindy and a fair bit of year 1 and his ongoing problems throughout his early years and teens. The amount of money allocated in the budget equates to, with some quick math, \$16 700 per kid per year. Given what the minister said about how much intervention is required, is \$16 700 enough for those children who are the most prolific of these juveniles and who are in danger of repetitive offending and ending up in the adult justice system? If it is enough, can the minister give us an outline of how \$16 700 per kid per year will be utilised to get the outcomes the government is seeking through this program?

Ms S.F. McGURK: First of all, the name of the program is Target 120, but the scoping of the project—we have said this publicly—is such that we will be able to work with 300 children over the life of the project, which is four years. The money that has been allocated as part of the business plan is not the only money that will be spent. I gave the example of a not-for-profit organisation being engaged to help broker for the needs of that child and his family. Clearly, if those brokers work with drug and alcohol providers, mental health services, and child protection and housing workers in the Department of Communities, those are resources that already exist within government. They will not be additional funds allocated to the project. Similar to the West Pilbara plan and the early years initiative, for which I am responsible, we fully expect that it will not be business as usual for the government. We will do things differently and bring a much more coordinated effort to the table to help better meet the needs of this vulnerable cohort.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The minister mentioned that she selected Bunbury as the first place to more or less start the program. Is the minister able to outline the data she accessed and looked at, or what process she went through, to choose Bunbury over other parts of Western Australia?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is Bunbury and Armadale, so one regional and one metropolitan. There is a range of different data; partly, it is the capacity of the community itself and whether there are services in place that we can work with to help bring a concentration of effort. Frankly, in both of those places there are high levels of juvenile disengagement, particularly in Bunbury. Certainly in the times that I have visited Bunbury as a minister, I have seen that drug and alcohol issues are significant and homelessness and antisocial behaviour among young people are issues. We will use a range of different criteria to identify what areas we move into as we roll out the plan over the four years. It will include police statistics, youth justice data, school attendance data, drug and alcohol abuse, child protection issues and, as I said in answering previous questions, it is worthwhile rolling out the

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implementation rather than trying to do everything at once. I heard the previous Commissioner of Police say that he supported this approach but thought that we could easily magnify it tenfold. We need to start and we need experience in how this will work. The potential for the data analytics underpinning this project is that we can track—we do not do it enough in social policy—the effectiveness of our interventions. If those interventions are effective and working, we should do more of them; if they are not working, we should change tack. I have heard it said that social policy interventions are often measured by our intent rather than our effectiveness. The meaning might be all well and good, but how effective are those interventions? We are hoping that we can get some experience and runs on the board. I imagine that many members in the chamber would like their communities prioritised for Target 120. Just before I left my office, I received a letter from the member for Kalgoorlie in which he congratulated us on this policy and said that he hoped Kalgoorlie would be next in line because of the extent of frustration in the community about disengaged young people in the goldfields and Kalgoorlie.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The minister alluded to how the government will measure the success of the program. Can she outline how the success of the program will be measured, what key performance indicators are being set for the program and the time line that will be allocated to it?

Ms S.F. McGURK: One of the challenges with social policy is a direct KPI. What that means in human terms can often be quite difficult to measure, particularly when we are not inputting with equal units. Some people come to the project with a lot more challenges in their lives, families and communities than is the case for others. That can be challenging, particularly when we are trying to measure effort across a range of different communities. Reduction in juvenile crime is an obvious measure. I think a lot of community members will be interested in safer communities—the extent of antisocial behaviour at night and the like—and school attendance. We should be looking at measures of wellbeing. What are the health measures? For instance, work is being done by the Telethon Kids Institute looking at the number of children in Banksia Hill who have either foetal alcohol spectrum disorder or developmental issues. If those issues are properly identified and dealt with in terms of education and the services they receive, that is a real step forward, rather than not being diagnosed or not being identified at all. They are the sorts of things we are looking at.

[3.30 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister mentioned one of the criteria for selecting Bunbury and Armadale was that there were services to support the rollout, which makes sense. I am being selfish again: in areas such as the central wheatbelt, we do not have those services. Does that preclude us or is that a risk in terms of the model working? Has thought been given to how the minister might address that in areas like the electorates of Central Wheatbelt and Roe, and probably the midwest to a degree?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have no doubt that many communities and towns have challenges that have triggered us to look at Target 120, including juvenile disengagement and antisocial behaviour, if not juvenile crime. No, that will not be the only criterion. We needed to crawl before we could walk and walk before we could run. We wanted to ensure that we gave the program the best chance of success in looking at all those different factors. As I have said, these elements should eventually underpin a lot of our effort in social policy. We should be using data a lot better to track not only where our effort is directed, but also how effective it is. We should be a lot more coordinated across government at the very least, let alone with the community sector; that is, not leaving the community sector to do its work and us operating separately. We should actually be working together.

To digress for a moment, a large contract was given to an Aboriginal-controlled organisation headed by Wungening Aboriginal Corporation for early in-home support for Aboriginal families in the metropolitan area. I was really heartened to hear that child protection officers are going to continue working with that cohort with the Aboriginal-controlled organisation. They will not say, “You’ve got the contract to work with these at-risk families whose kids have been taken into Child Protection; we’ll leave you to it and work over here.” A relationship continues between the two to better understand the needs of those families and to learn from each other. I think those elements should inform a lot of what we are doing to better address challenges throughout our state.

Mr Y. MUBARAKAI: Further to the line item “Target 120” on page 415 in budget paper No 2, can the minister outline the collaboration between the agencies, please?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We have talked about some of that. The member for Churchlands asked whether the budget allocation included in it all of government effort—it does not. It is additional money that will be given as dedicated resources to make sure that there is someone there to advocate for young people and their families. As we know, bureaucracy can be really challenging. What ends up happening is that those people do not navigate their way through the system—it just does not happen. We wonder why those services are not available to them. At a senior level, the Department of Health, the Mental Health Commission and its Drug and Alcohol Office are very challenging areas to work within to get effective interventions. I have mentioned the opportunities that are available in the Department of Communities. There are also opportunities in Education. What is happening with

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those kids at school? If they are not attending school, why not? If they attend school, are they learning or are they disruptive? What efforts and expertise can we bring to the table? It is important to have a real relationship with those kids and their families to better understand their needs. As I said before, it is crucial that some of that work is given to Aboriginal-controlled organisations. People are more relaxed and more likely to relate to someone who is like them and understands their circumstance, just like any of us are. Ensuring that the point of contact is as strong as possible is important and also building up the capacity of Aboriginal-controlled organisations to do some of this work is an important policy of this government.

Ms C.M. ROWE: I refer to the service summary on page 420 of budget paper No 2 and service 2 titled “Preventing and Responding to Family and Domestic Violence”. Can the minister outline the measures that the McGowan government is taking to support victims of family and domestic violence?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, I can. As the first Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, obviously this has been a priority for me. There are existing services in this state. Sadly, they are usually oversubscribed. There is a lot more demand than can currently be met. As we talk more about domestic violence, we want to encourage people to come forward to properly identify domestic violence in all its forms and seek assistance. We want that assistance to be there when it is needed. Since coming to government, we have done a range of things. This budget builds on those initiatives that we have put in place in just over 12 months since being in office. The new initiatives in this budget include \$850 000 a year for a nine-bed, 24/7 facility for male perpetrators. Some members have visited the residential facility Breathing Space, which is run by Communicare. We are going to build on that model. We will build a nine-bed, 24/7 residential facility based on the Breathing Space model.

Perpetrator interventions is a challenging area. It is a relatively new area of work in understanding domestic violence and how we can turn around perpetrators’ behaviour. Until now, the best we hoped for was a foray into the criminal justice system. Often, that is the appropriate response. When men want to change their behaviour and deal with some of the issues, the perpetrator program is available to them. Our experience is still in its infancy in Australia and internationally. Commitments were given for \$1.05 million over four years to establish counselling in the Peel region through Allambee Counselling. That has been an important initiative. Sadly, Peel has a high level of domestic violence. In fact, one of the two new refuges funded in the previous budget is likely to be in the Peel region.

[3.40 pm]

We had previously allocated \$1.6 million for identifying the particular needs of culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal communities in the area of domestic violence. Some of that will go to service delivery, but mostly it will go to understanding what our better response needs to be. I do not think anyone can doubt that understanding the situation and the circumstances in which domestic violence, or any social ills, occur is crucial to properly addressing the problem. Amongst Aboriginal communities, where there is a high level of family and domestic violence, properly understanding what is going on is a challenge for our government, as it is throughout the country. Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety has been doing some work, including in Western Australia, to properly identify and analyse what is going on, and what our best responses can be. In the first instance, we would do well to listen to what Aboriginal women are saying about who they feel comfortable with, coming forward to talk about family and domestic violence. We also need to be cautious about child protection, because the unintended consequence sometimes can be that women come forward to talk about domestic violence, and then their children are identified as being at risk. Although they are not perpetrators themselves, the risk is still too high, and they end up getting pulled into the child protection system.

We have two new refuges, we have CALD and Aboriginal services, and Allambee Counselling, which I have spoken about. The member will know that we have just introduced into the Parliament changes to the Residential Tenancies Act. They are significant changes, and they will be debated when Parliament resumes. It has been really heartening to see not only community support for those changes but also particularly industry support. The Real Estate Institute of Western Australia and organisations representing landowners and landlords have shown real leadership. Other legislative changes include the National Family Violence Order Scheme.

Also, as a government, we have been trying to make sure that people understand the severity of this problem in the community, and the various forms that domestic violence can take. Where we have been able to talk about that publicly, we have been doing that. The campaign in November, called “16 Days in WA”, was an opportunity for many men to come forward and talk about standing against domestic violence. Not only will they not commit domestic violence themselves, but they will call it out when other men are violent, sexist or demeaning towards women, which gives licence to aggressive and violent behaviour. I know that the previous child protection and family support department was a white ribbon accredited agency, and now the Department of Communities itself is going through the accreditation process. There is a better understanding within government about what we need to do as an employer and as a leader. We have established 10 days of leave for employees in the public sector who

are experiencing domestic violence. That has been important not only because the government is the state's largest employer and, statistically, that workforce will include people who are experiencing domestic violence, and we want to show them that they should come forward and seek support, but it also encourages a conversation in the workplace and the broader community about the prevalence of family and domestic violence.

Just as I have acknowledged the efforts of REIWA, I have been really pleased to work with a number of employees since becoming minister. Rio Tinto came and saw us about what it could do to better address gender inequity in the company, and we talked about domestic violence leave. Since then, that company has not only put domestic violence leave in place nationally, but also sponsored Rosie Batty to come to Western Australia to go to some of its operations in the Pilbara, where it is starting to deal with the real issues of having a significant footprint as an employer in the community, and what taking a stand against domestic violence means for not only the victims, but also the perpetrators employed by the company. If there are victims and perpetrators in a small town, what does that mean? They can be quite challenging conversations. Rio Tinto has then gone on to become white ribbon accredited itself. It is a really rigorous accreditation process, and shows a preparedness by the company—there are many others like it—to deal with the high levels of domestic violence we have.

It is a complex problem, and the government is putting resources into not only services to respond to it, but also understanding the problem better in all its forms, and leading the conversation in the community that says this is entirely preventable. This should not be part of the way that we relate to each other. It certainly does not serve women, girls, young people and children well, but it also does not serve men well.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the table of government goals, desired outcomes and services on page 419 of budget paper No 2, specifically to the desired outcome of children and young people needing protection and being safe from abuse and harm, and the working with children check. Can the minister confirm that no person who has received a working with children card has been subject to allegations of child abuse?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Working with children checks are an important part of what the government does, and we take that system very seriously. In Western Australia, we have a very rigorous system. The demand for those checks continues to grow. Currently 359 129 cards are in operation, and 991 negative notices have been issued. Sorry, can the member repeat her question?

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister confirm that no person who has received a working with children card has been subject to allegations of child abuse?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I might hand over to Brad Jolly. I like to think that I can answer these things myself, but I know that he lives and breathes this, so I will hand over to him to answer that question.

[3.50 pm]

Mr B. Jolly: Thank you, minister, and thanks, Chair. I thank the honourable member for the question. At the point of application, every applicant is screened across all Australian jurisdictions for offences, and those checks are coordinated through the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission. If a record of conviction or a pending relevant charge is recorded against an applicant and that information is provided back to the unit, those pending charges are assessed against the requirements of the legislation. Some of those charges or convictions would automatically disqualify those people from having a card issued, in which case they would be issued a negative notice. In some instances it is less cut and dried, so the staff of the working with children unit would need to look at the context in which the offences or charges were laid and would need to look at the relevant case law and make a determination as to whether or not it was appropriate to grant that person a card or to issue a negative assessment.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify that, if there is a charge relating to child abuse, are there any circumstances under which someone will receive a working with children card, and are there any examples of a person having received a card following a charge or allegation of some form of child abuse?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Not to my knowledge; that would not be the case. Mr Jolly was just outlining the systems that occur within Australia to ensure there is proper communication between jurisdictions when a charge occurs. That is understood across jurisdictions as an area that needs constant refinement and work. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has highlighted that, and we are continuing to look at that in relation to our response to the royal commission. It is also a priority of all states and the federal government to ensure that we have proper communications between jurisdictions when any sort of charge is laid, that the systems talk to each other and that they are live systems. With regard to working with children cards and the whole checking process, one of the things from a government point of view is that it is an imperfect system in that it relates only to people who have had charges or convictions that are of concern. The message from government is that child safety is something that we should be concerned about all the time and have a good understanding of throughout our community, in our families, in our community organisations and in our institutions. The royal commission has done a very comprehensive piece of work, making sure that we as a community and society are alive to what that

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means in practice. I am not disregarding the member's question about working with children checks; that is an important safeguard that we have, but certainly, as a government, the message we want to give is that the card system works only when someone has a charge or a conviction or has indicated some sort of behaviour or a flag has been raised. There are concerns that there are risks that cannot be captured within the working with children checks process.

Ms L. METTAM: Perhaps more for my benefit than for others, given the importance of these working with children checks, where does the obligation sit for different community groups and organisations to have these working with children checks? I am talking about various community groups that are obviously frequented by children. What are the obligations for a working with children check?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There is a state act, the Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004, which outlines the sort of work that people do when they need a working with children card. That is outlined now, and most community organisations, institutions and the like that are involved in child-related work will be aware of their obligations. The member might know that one of the surf clubs in Cottesloe—I do not know whether the case has been finalised—was recently prosecuted because someone on its board of management or an office bearer within the organisation did not have a working with children card but nevertheless was allowed to continue to work with children in the organisation, so the state government regulatory unit is taking a prosecution against that club because it failed in its obligations. I am not sure where that case is at, but it received some publicity a while ago.

Ms L. METTAM: The reason I ask relates to a community church in Dunsborough where there was a well-publicised case of a sex offender who had groomed a young boy. I just wonder: what are their obligations? The perpetrator had had a series of charges and had previously gone to jail in Canada and would not have passed a working with children test. I just wonder: would there have been any obligation for that community church to go through a process of ensuring that everyone had a working with children check?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not have the legislation in front of me, but it outlines very clearly organisations in which people are involved in child-related work. That includes community organisations, volunteer organisations and the like. There is an obligation for key people within those organisations to have working with children checks. I do not know whether I can hand over to Mr Jolly to answer that question about a church official.

Mr B. Jolly: As the minister has indicated, section 6 of the act sets out, I guess, the types of work that are considered to be child-related work. Typically, it is activities that fall within the scope of section 6 of the act and are not incidental to the normal duties performed in that role. Essentially, they have to be weighed on a case-by-case basis.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is outlined in the act, but just to pick up the member's concerns, it would be quite real for members of the community in Dunsborough and the like. It has been picked up and highlighted in the work of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: what does child safety mean in our community? As a government, I think many people want to know what that means—whether they have kids who go to other children's houses for sleepovers, or their kids are involved in local arts organisations or a dance group, scouts or a sporting club and the like. There are many examples, let alone religious institutions, as the member highlighted. What does child safety mean for all of us? There must be an understanding, not as an alarmist response, but in a responsible and effective way so that people properly understand what child safety actually means. That is something that we are picking up in our responses to the royal commission.

The CHAIR: Members, it is appropriate that we have a short 10-minute break.

Meeting suspended from 3.59 to 4.11 pm

The CHAIR: The next person I have on the list is the member for Central Wheatbelt.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to spending changes on page 415 of the *Budget Statements* and the crisis and transitional accommodation in Collie. Can I clarify whether that was an election commitment?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, it was.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Has a business case gone before cabinet for that expenditure?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The idea behind this was to service the needs of people in Collie. There was a request from the member for Collie—Preston. Some crisis and accommodation services are located in Collie and, as the member is aware, people access services in Bunbury and other regional centres. There are times when people literally need a roof over their heads. That may be due to cases of family and domestic violence or homelessness, or it might even be some transitory issues. The idea is that we provide one or two houses with some security attached to them, but they will not be fully serviced and so will not have staff attached to them. There has been a budget allocation to provide some operational funding, but it is really so that people can have very short term accommodation and we can then link them with services that they might need. The problem with providing a full women's refuge, as the member would be aware, is that significant costs are associated with them, and the issues we need to address

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are not just family and domestic violence. People might need accommodation for a couple of nights and they can then link in with another service. To answer the member's question, a business case was not prepared for this in a fulsome way. The idea is to provide up to two houses—there might be one, but there are likely to be two. There would be some servicing, but most of the budget allocation is for the physical building.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I assume that the 2018–19 budget estimate is for the purchase of the housing, plus some of the operational funding, and then there is operational funding thereafter?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that coming from royalties for regions, either wholly or in part?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The capital expenditure of \$360 000 comes from royalties for regions and the \$60 000 per annum starting from January 2019 comes from the consolidated account.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Does the funding for the operation of the crisis accommodation come from consolidated revenue?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Has the department done any work on the need to roll out further facilities like this for other communities that might require such services?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, this was a specific election commitment in Collie. Partly because of the physical location of Collie, the challenge has been that they are not that far away from Bunbury, but often the services they need are not as accessible as they might be. To answer the question, this was a specific election commitment and we dealt with it as a need that was identified in Collie.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I refer to the “Spending Changes” table on page 415 of budget paper No 2, which contains a line item on the Breathing Space service for male perpetrators of family and domestic violence. I note the re-cashflow of \$200 000 next to that line, so that it now commences in 2019–20. There is nothing in the 2018–19 budget. Given the seriousness of this issue, why has the government delayed the project by one year?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There are services. The member may have heard me talk about this when the member for Belmont asked about our initiatives around family and domestic violence. It was an election commitment that we would have another perpetrator intervention program based on the Breathing Space model. A service called Breathing Space is run by Communicare and operates near Kwinana. It is a 24-hour residential facility where people stay for at least three months, and I think they are looking to extend that a little. People from throughout the state can stay there and deal with some of the underlying issues but work towards some real and lasting change. Our commitment is to open a similar facility. The work to make sure that we identify where that facility will be and how it will be put together is still being done. We cannot do everything at once. That is partly why we have tried to manage what we are doing. I do not doubt that there is a need for that now and the member will not get any disagreement from me or from anyone working in the FDV space about that. There is a need for a lot of things throughout our community. We are trying to do what we can to make sure that our initiatives are good models and have good case practice around them and experienced providers. Four or five members have asked me if one of these perpetrator intervention services can be located in their electorate. This service, like some women's refuges, does not need to be in direct proximity to where people live. When I visited there, two or three men from regional areas had come to Perth because it is a residential facility. Essentially, they are saying that there is a real need for this and they want a place. To answer the question, it was an election commitment. We need to make sure that we can sustain the model with the money we have. I have plenty of ideas about what we would do in the FDV space if we had unlimited funds.

[4.20 pm]

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: To clarify, the minister mentioned a provider called Communicare, which runs a 24-hour service. Are the people who stay in that Communicare service male perpetrators or people who are subject to domestic violence?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, they are perpetrators. Breathing Space is run by Communicare for male perpetrators. The funding will be for a very similar facility, which will also be run by Communicare and based on the same model.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Is Communicare currently running that program?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Where does it appear in the budget?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is funded under the services we were talking about before. It is service 2 on page 420. The line item is “Preventing and Responding to Family and Domestic Violence.”

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Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI: I refer to “Women’s Grants” on page 440 of budget paper No 2. Can the minister please outline what these grants involve and whether the government is taking any other measures to support Western Australian women?

Ms S.F. McGURK: A range of different small grants of \$85 000 a year are available. Individual organisations can apply for up to \$10 000. A real variety of organisations apply and receive those grants, including women who help to source professional clothing for women who need to revamp their wardrobes to try to get back into the workforce, and women who are looking at health and wellbeing issues, leadership and decision-making, and, obviously, some of the safety issues we have discussed regarding family and domestic violence. The criteria for people who can apply for these small grants are very broad. That is not to say such a small budget allocation and applying for these small grants captures the need to address gender inequity in our society—it does not in any way, shape or form. In fact, as Minister for Women’s Interests, I am very aware that we have a huge amount of work to do to address gender inequity in our society, as do most societies across the planet in their various forms. In Western Australia, one of the clear indicators of inequity is the gender pay gap. We have a persistently high gender pay gap, which is higher than the national average. Although it has now gone down to I think the lowest point it has been for some years at about 22 per cent, the national gender pay gap is just over 15 per cent so, as a state, we are behind the game. That means not only that women are held back from their seat at the table, which they should have in society, but also that we are all held back as a state. We are not using the potential of women and girls in our communities and we are not participating fully throughout industries where we could. We are not accessing the best and brightest that we could in all areas of our community if we are holding back half the community; that is, women.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to the income statement for the Department of Communities on page 439 and specifically to the “Royalties For Regions Fund” line item. I am happy to take the answer as supplementary information if that is more appropriate. Can the minister provide a list of projects from within the department that are funded by royalties for regions? Can the minister define where projects are being funded only by royalties for regions and where there is a combination of funding? Can the minister list any projects or services that were previously partly or wholly funded by consolidated revenue and are now being funded by royalties for regions funding in this budget going forward, or whether any projects have gone the other way?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have a table in front of me, so I am happy to read it. Some of these areas are in my portfolio and some of them are not. Some of the areas within the Department of Communities might impact on areas for which Minister Murray is responsible—seniors and volunteering. In my portfolio, it includes the responsible parenting support services; the Kimberley family violence regional plan; the Indigenous visitor hostel in Derby; operational funding for the Broome Aboriginal short-stay accommodation facility, which is still being constructed, as the member is probably aware; operational expenditure for the family and domestic violence centre in Peel, which we referred to earlier; culturally appropriate services for victims of domestic violence; family and domestic violence counselling services in the Peel, which is the Allambee Counselling money to which we referred earlier; some portion of the Respectful Relationships program in schools; the regional community childcare development fund, stage 2, which we spoke about before; a small portion of the funds to reinstate financial counselling services; the Dalyellup Family Medical Centre; and an element of the district allowance for communities. They are all the areas that are incorporated under my portfolio responsibilities.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is the minister able to list any projects that were previously partly or wholly funded by consolidated revenue and are now being funded by royalties for regions as of this budget?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Sorry, before I answer that, I should have looked at the last page—elements of the regional services reform unit should have been added to the list. The answer is: not that I am aware of. I think we have been pretty clear about the new allocations. They were election commitments to some physical infrastructure that we have spoken about, including a new women’s refuge in the Peel area. We also talked about Allambee Counselling, the crisis and transitional accommodation in Collie, and the Dalyellup Family Medical Centre. I think all the areas I have listed were either election commitments for physical builds or were a carryover from the previous government.

Mr S.K. L’ESTRANGE: I refer to page 421 of budget paper No 2 and the 2017–18 estimated actual for a number of key effectiveness indicators. The target for the percentage of homelessness clients with some or all goals achieved at the completion of the homelessness service support period was 85 per cent, and the estimated actual was 82 per cent, so it was below the target. The target for the percentage of departmental clients who were assessed and received a response as a result of a FDV incident and did not require another FDV-related response within 12 months was 80 per cent, but it was not met. The 80 per cent target for the proportion of Aboriginal children in the CEO’s care placed in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle was not achieved. Can the minister advise why those key performance indicators, as well as others, were not met? Was it due to staff reductions, the amalgamation of agencies or another factor?

[4.30 pm]

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will take each item separately; firstly, the proportion of Aboriginal children in the CEO's care placed in accordance with the Aboriginal and TSI child placement principle. The idea of that principle, which was agreed to across the states and territories, is that children in the care of the CEO of the department are placed with either immediate family, extended Aboriginal family or an Aboriginal carer. That is, very importantly, recognition that Aboriginal children need to maintain a very real and live connection to their culture. It is an important part of identity. For some time, about two-thirds of the Aboriginal children in care have been placed in accordance with that principle. The member asked a good question about why our target is 80 per cent when for some time it has been more around 60 to 64 or 65 per cent. I think that is a reasonable question, and I have raised it with the department.

I think the member's question was about how we arrive at those indicators, rather than the policy underpinning it. I suppose the area that exercises my mind the most is how we can improve the number of Aboriginal children placed in accordance with that principle. About 55 per cent of WA children now in care are Aboriginal, so the majority. That compares with about three per cent of our overall adult population being Aboriginal; for children it is about 16 per cent. That is a shamefully high number of Aboriginal children in care. The other point to make is that by national standards it is not too bad. The Northern Territory is probably the most comparable jurisdiction with us, and its number of children placed in care in accordance with that principle is about half the number of ours, so about 30 per cent. The national average is about 67 per cent, on the figures I have in front of me, so WA is slightly under, but in states with large Aboriginal populations the figure is distorted. We should compare ourselves with states with a large number of Aboriginal communities. In Queensland it is about 57 per cent.

We recently undertook a review of the child protection legislation in WA and tabled the results during the last week of sitting last year. A key theme picked up by that review was the need to improve the work we do with Aboriginal-controlled organisations and the need to improve the cultural understanding of the department in working with Aboriginal communities not only to serve the children in care, but also to try to break the cycle of kids entering care. Unfortunately, a number experience homelessness and are more likely to end up in the juvenile justice system than other children and have other challenges in life. We need to try to do better for those kids, and a better appreciation of cultural needs and strengthening their cultural connections is a big part of that.

That was a longwinded answer, but I think the member's question was about how we arrive at the target. I think that is a fair point. We arrive at a high target because we have ambitions to do better, but the reality is that we have struggled to get over about 60 to 65 per cent for some time. We want more Aboriginal carers, but finding Aboriginal carers is a challenge while we have a high number of kids in care. One other issue raised in the legislative review was the valid argument that the principle states immediate family, extended Aboriginal family or an Aboriginal carer. In a large state like WA that means, in keeping with the Aboriginal placement principle, they might end up getting taken to Perth or the south west to be with an Aboriginal carer rather than staying with a non-Aboriginal carer in the same town. I have to question whether it might be better for them to stay in a predominantly Aboriginal town, albeit not with an Aboriginal carer but in their own community, rather than being taken somewhere else. We know that the Kimberley and the south west are completely different worlds. That issue was picked up in the legislative review.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Most of the minister's answer focused on Aboriginal children —

Ms S.F. McGURK: Sorry. There were other points, yes. I got carried away.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: That is okay. I have a follow-on question linked to the minister's answer, particularly the part about 55 per cent of those in care being Aboriginal. It is clearly a significant and complex problem to try to make sure that the best is done for these children. I refer to note 1 underneath that table that shows that the proportion of Aboriginal children in care has increased at a higher rate than the number of available placement options. That feeds into the minister's answer. The minister mentioned the whole question of whether these kids can be kept in community so that they are close to their Aboriginal culture, or whether they should be moved to another Aboriginal carer somewhere else. That is no doubt a tricky one. Even more tricky is if we consider Aboriginal child sexual abuse victims, for example, or those with a family member or someone close to them having been charged with a child sex offence. How can the minister ensure the safety of the child while balancing that against keeping them close to community, if keeping them in community is dangerous?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I assure the member and the public that child safety is not compromised. If there is a risk to their safety from either sexual or physical abuse or anything else, that is taken very seriously by the department. In cases of challenging behaviour within a community as a whole, child safety is prioritised. If there are sufficient concerns about where that child is living, they are dealt with. There is no doubt about that.

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The member's question raised another issue: if child sexual abuse victims exhibit harmful sexual behaviour, as often happens, how we manage that. In fact, quite a big part of the work of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse comprised how we best respond to that. It is a matter about which I have been talking to my state counterparts whose states have reasonable Aboriginal populations, because, again, it is important that we make sure that we understand culturally appropriate responses and build up the capacity of Aboriginal authority on those questions as part of our response. That is one part of my answer.

Another part of the answer is how we balance keeping children with their biological parents, which is always the preference, with deciding that the child's safety is so compromised that the child needs to be removed from the parents. This decision confronts the child protection system every day and, again, it is very challenging. I have received, as would have the people who held the position before me, any number of letters from people who think we have got that judgement wrong. When people think that the department has not made the right call, the department has an internal complaints process, and I encourage people to access that. I encourage those within my office to go back and have a dialogue with the department about whether their concerns about the conduct of the department have been heard properly so that they feel that they have had a voice and have been listened to by the department. There is merit in us looking at some sort of external oversight of the decision-making process, which we do not have in our system. That issue has been taken up in the review of the legislation so that, as it is with the government, if someone is not happy with the system, they can go to the Ombudsman, who will look at the judgement and determine whether the proper procedures and checks and balances were adhered to. There is merit in doing that. Being able to make that judgement is the really tricky part of child protection.

[4.40 pm]

The CHAIR: I have read a fair bit about a recent case in the Northern Territory. I cannot remember whether it was in Tennant Creek or Katherine. I am interested in what the minister said about external oversight of that process. I wonder whether we have become too reluctant to bring some of those kids into care. Is another state using a process of external oversight?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not know the answer to that. I do not know whether external oversight would increase or decrease the number of children in care, but that would not be our motivation for having external oversight. Again, because we have a large number of children in care, there is the view that we are bringing too many into care, but others think that not enough of them are in care considering some of the safety concerns in some communities. It is constant work in child protection in both the practice of child protection workers operating on the ground and the department's structure to make the right judgement in our interactions with families. Depending on how it occurs, taking children away from their biological parents is a very serious matter. It is very traumatic for children. Internationally, the research on that is very firm, but our understanding of the importance of child attachment and what removing children from their biological parents does to children grows all the time. Having said that, kids need to be safe and they need to be put into a stable environment as quickly as possible. The royal commission has taken a number of those issues into consideration in its work. If the member has not had a look at any of that work, I encourage him to. We are formulating our response to the royal commission at the moment. Those responses partly go to the sorts of systems that the member for Vasse raised, such as a church or community organisation, and the safeguards and assurance that members of the public can have when they send their child to an organisation, whether it is a school, a volunteer organisation or an institution, and know that they will be safe. It is very hard to make a judgement call about whether we leave a child with their biological parents and try to work with that family to improve their behaviour or whether the child's safety has been too compromised that they need to be taken away and put into another arrangement and, after they are taken away, at what point are they taken away permanently or until they turn 18, which is what occurs now. The review of the legislation dealt with some of those issues. We have looked at whether we have the right legislative safeguards or systems in place. The royal commission is dealing with some of those issues, such as whether child safety is compromised or enhanced by the current system. Another part of the department's work is making sure that it has enough rigor to work with those families to make the right judgement call.

I will make one other point, Chair, and that is that the really difficult area is when we decide to intervene and make an application before the Children's Court to take these children into care either temporarily or until they are aged 18. The real opportunities, of course, are before things get that bad—so, working at an earlier stage with a family to try to arrest worrying behaviour to make sure that family and domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse is dealt with and that the supports of the extended family are harnessed and worked together to provide a safe and more stable environment for those kids. I have mentioned before that we have given a \$20 million contract to an Aboriginal consortium in the metropolitan area for in-home support for Aboriginal families before kids are taken into the care of the department, the chief executive officer, and placed with foster carers or wherever they are placed. The in-home support will support those families whether they need financial counselling or drug and

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alcohol support or support to make sure that each day the kids get to school, stay at school and engage with school. That is the in-home support contract, which, I think, is very challenging but exciting.

Ms L. METTAM: Are there any circumstances in which it would be suitable in the eyes of the department or the minister for an Aboriginal child to live with a person or a family member who has been either charged with or convicted of a child sex offence?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will ask Jackie Tang to address this as well. Jackie is the assistant director general responsible for child protection services. I understand that the department would do a risk assessment of the severity of the case and the possible risk to the child. Some examples in which discretion might apply is when a person who has been charged or convicted is a child themselves and is living in the house. It will depend on the severity of the charge. Given the nature of the member's question, it may mean that the charges are of a relatively minor nature, if you like, such as accessing pornography or some sort of indiscretion of a non-systematic nature, or are quite severe and result in a criminal conviction. In that instance, I would very much hope that that would not be the case. I will hand over to Jackie Tang to address that issue.

[4.50 pm]

Ms J. Tang: I make the straight-out comment that that would never be acceptable because each case needs to be taken into account. The best interests of the child is always taken into account. It depends on whether there is an indication that the perpetrator might be charged with a sexual offence. When talking about intra-familial sexual abuse or abuse of another nature, or it is actually against that child or a child outside that family, it is a complex assessment that is not done in five minutes. It is always, as I say, done in the best interests of the child. There are professionals—psychologists and child protection workers—who have this skill. They look at the circumstances of the family, what safety measures are in place to mitigate any risk that might be identified, and very much work a safety plan around that child and that family. If it is determined that the child could safely remain in that family because in fact the risk is not to that child—even though a perpetrator who has committed an offence might be there—a professional decision is made in each case and that would have a safety plan around it. If it were felt the child would be at risk, and therefore the best interests of the child would be served in placing that child outside that family with another family member or they would enter another foster care or another placement, that decision would be made.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify, are there circumstances in which the department deems that it is in the best interests of the child to live with a family member who has sexually offended against them?

Ms J. Tang: No.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will ask Jackie to answer that.

Ms J. Tang: My reference to that was that every assessment would need to be made, and if an offence were actually committed against that specific child, the decision around whether the child would stay in that family would be made in determination of the safety elements around that family, ensuring that that child is safe for that placement. I cannot say today that we have had that situation. If there is a situation that anyone is aware of that needs to be brought to the attention of the department, we will certainly take that as a case that we need to inquire about. But it is all around the safety elements of that child within that family.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: In response to that answer, maybe the minister could assist us if I use this example: over the last 12 months the department would have put in place safety measures taking into account what it believes to be in the best interests of the child and the family. The department has put its safety measures in place. So, whether or not there is a child sex offender in close proximity to where that child lives, all the safety measures have been put in place but there has been a breach of safety, impacting on that child. Does the department keep data that shows, "We've put in this safety measure, we know the risks, we have mitigated the risks as best as possible, but there has been a breach"? Does the department keep data about breaches of child safety in those circumstances?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The member is asking whether the department collects data that identifies breaches. I do not know whether he has had much experience with the child protection system but there are families who often lead pretty chaotic lives. Sometimes these issues are clear. I am not talking about breaches of safety plans or concerns about sexual abuse, because they are very much taken seriously by the department and child protection workers working with families. I guess I am making the point that if a person had been convicted, or even if they had been only charged and that charge had come before the court, there will often be conditions placed by the court, and they need to be adhered to. They are not something that can be changed by the department. What the member described, whether it is someone who has been convicted of child sex abuse or there are charges against them, can describe a number of behaviours. That really leads to a judgement call on the part of practice workers working with that family about whether that individual child is at risk. An example might be a child perpetrator. Sadly, that

is often the case. Trying to keep them in connection with their family and sometimes with other children will be a judgement made in conjunction with not only the child protection workers, but also the Children's Court to decide whether other children are at risk by having, in this case, a perpetrator who is also a child under 18 placed in proximity to them.

Having said that, I would like to give members and the public every assurance that these decisions are not made lightly when it comes to sexual abuse. I am reminded that in fact there are some statistics about these issues in the annual report. The member might want to look at the safety plans in that and at how the department puts plans in place and monitors whether there has been any variance to those plans, and the adherence practice on the part of the department.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I appreciate that answer, minister. She is quite right. I do not have any experience in this area of government; I have never worked in it at all. For me, one of the great aspects of budget estimates is in trying to gain a greater understanding of these issues through the minister and through the experts and advisers she has around her. With a background of problem solving myself, I can understand that the department would have every good intention to do what is in the best interests of the child. Looking at our history as a society in Perth, Western Australia, on the Swan River, the evolution of child protection is ongoing. It is not going to stop here; we will continue to look for ways to improve it. It is in that context that I am asking whether the department, although it makes decisions in and around what is in the best interests of the child, keeps data on when it gets decisions wrong. That is the only way it will be able to say, "We're trying to do this but there's now a pattern that shows it might not be working." How do we look at that data to say that the judgement call in and around community and family is to place the child with another family or somewhere else? All those decisions have to be made in some context. The question is simply: does the department collect data that shows that after a safety program has been put in place and a decision has been made, a breach has occurred or the safety program has not worked? Does the department keep a record of that? If it did, it would then be in a position to review programs and processes to help improve child safety into the future.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to Jackie Tang to talk in a more detailed way about the best practice guidelines. I would point the member to the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 421 of budget paper No 2. Within the context of the budget papers, we have some particular line items et cetera that show some of the headline figures. There is, in that table, an item for "Children and young people needing protection are safe from abuse and harm", and then "Improved safety". The member can see there a target of 95 per cent, and it is estimated that we achieve about 90 per cent. I will hand over to Jackie Tang to talk about the specifics of what happens at practice level.

[5.00 pm]

[Ms M.M. Quirk took the chair.]

Ms J. Tang: In relation to improved safety, it is a little bit difficult to read that line. It has to be read a few times, but it states —

Proportion of children not subject to a subsequent substantiation of harm within 12 months of a previous substantiation of harm

We are saying there that, for 90 per cent of the time, when we said that there was a substantiation, it did not occur again. The next measure is —

Proportion of children not subject to a substantiation of harm 12 months after an assessment of harm that was unsubstantiated

The first one is about there having been a substantiation of harm, and 12 months later the child was still safe. The second measure is that the harm was not substantiated, and they were safe for that period. It is not a pure measure, and it does not answer the member's initial question of the specifics when there is subsequent harm, of the nature of that subsequent harm. For this purpose, I cannot say for sure that we were able to produce detail for the actual nature of that substantiated harm, and whether they were physically hurt as opposed to sexually abused, and, if they were sexually abused, whether that was by a family member or by the same person, or within that safety plan.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I was also going to add that it may have been neglect. It might not be physical or sexual harm. There might be trauma that is so severe that the harm is defined in that broader way.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Just further to that answer, I see that the targets for those two categories that the minister has outlined to us for the 2018–19 budget are set at 95 per cent. The question was actually: is the department keeping the data to check? That is the target, or the goal, but where there are breaches, is the department keeping a watch on how those breaches occur, with a view to adapting and changing policy moving forward?

Ms J. Tang: At the district level and at the case level, we have a hierarchy of team leaders, district assistant directors and district directors who are all involved in the management of each case within their district. When a safety plan is put in place, a care plan care team is put around that family. When something fails, in the sense that the child appears to be re-traumatised, or something else happens, all future plans involve the family, the significant others and all the team levels. Within each district, it is a constant process, because it involves humans, families and complexities; that is the constant work of the professionals in those districts. It then comes up the line. In order to keep these statistics, we need to be able to keep a check on when there has been a failure, so those statistics are kept. My concern is to be able to say that we can specifically answer the question for the member. We want no further harm in 100 per cent of cases, so when we see the lower rate, it is a bit—you know. But there is also the realistic nature of the trauma that is experienced across generations and within families, and that it is not going to be just a success story the first time something comes to light.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I appreciate that answer, and I suppose we are getting to the point where the rubber hits the road; that is, if we keep trying to fix in the same method that we have been trying to fix, it might actually be that that the method needs to shift somewhat. Even though we have the best professionals with the best intentions and everybody doing their best, they are doing their best in the context, maybe, of what they have done before. I am suggesting the possibility of a longitudinal look at this. At what point do we say that we need to change the way we do this? Has the minister any data to support that?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I was going to point out to the member some initiatives that were commenced under the previous government through the child protection and family support department that looked at out-of-home care reforms. Essentially, we are looking at a range of different reforms not only about how we liaise with the foster care system and the not-for-profits that work in this area, but also around safety assessments that are done of children. There is constant work in the department and nationally to ensure that we are refining the work done by practitioners working with families, the management systems that support them, and the collection of data. I mentioned that I think that there is merit, perhaps, in some sort of independent oversight of the system, so that if there are complaints, they are not just investigated by someone within the department, but someone externally could look at whether the current procedures were adhered to or whether the procedures themselves need to be challenged. Some of those reforms might be worth looking at, but, essentially, whether the safety assessment tools and the way that they are applied is the best possible is something that the department and I, as minister, are very aware of. We need to be constantly looking at whether we are doing the right thing with regard to those children.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the limitation of suitable foster homes or alternative accommodation for the child in question a consideration when making decisions about a particular child who is considered to be at risk in an environment where sex offences have been taking place?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, I would not say that a child is kept in a placement where there might be concerns about their safety because of the lack of availability of a suitable foster carer. Certainly, with regard to concern about some sort of sex offence, for instance, which is the nature of the member's question, I am not aware that a decision on whether to take a child into care temporarily or until they are 18 would be second-guessed because there was not a foster carer available.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister guarantee that no Aboriginal child victims are currently living with a person either charged with or convicted of a child sex offence?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I would be very surprised if the member was not channelling the shadow minister there, because he has asked me that question with regard to Roebourne, I think probably seven or eight times in the Legislative Council, and I have had a number of questions in the lower house as well. He has asked it with regard to Roebourne, and whether I can give guarantees that no child is living with someone who has been charged with or convicted of sex abuse. I wish I could give that guarantee for every child, and no children were at risk, but I do not know where every child sleeps every night. For that reason, I cannot give that guarantee, because children may stay in one house one night and stay somewhere else another night. We do everything we can to identify children at risk, to address the level of that risk, and to keep them safe and secure with their families; and, if that is not possible, to bring in the resources of the child protection system to put in place the best protections.

[5.10 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I understand the challenge of being able to answer this, given that children in a community may be moving and staying at different homes, but is the minister able to provide that guarantee or to answer the question in relation to the residences in which these children are living? Can the minister guarantee that no Aboriginal child victims are living at the official residence of anyone who has been charged with, or convicted of, a child sex offence?

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The CHAIR: Member, I am not sure the minister can properly answer that. She is damned if she says yes and she is damned if she says no. Maybe you could be a bit more precise in what question you put to the minister. I do not think she can usefully answer that in response to an item number in the budget. You might want to rephrase it.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Further to that, maybe I can offer some assistance.

The CHAIR: I do not care who asks the further question, but the way the question was phrased, it could not properly be answered in a meaningful way by the minister.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Further to that question, I will ask a specific data question. For example, if there is —

The CHAIR: Is this a further question, member for Churchlands?

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Yes, it is a further question. Maybe the question is not for the minister to guarantee, because I take the Chair's point on that; maybe it is simply a matter of asking a data question. How many children are currently residing, as their official address, in a household in which a member residing at that official address has been convicted of a child sex offence?

The CHAIR: Minister, you may well have to take that as supplementary, I think.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I would not like to take it as supplementary, because I do not know whether the Minister for Police or the Attorney General have data about where any of the people who have been convicted or charged are located throughout the state, and whether we know their official address; and, if we do know their official address, whether any children are located at that house. Again, I give the two members who are asking those questions, and anyone else who is interested, the assurance that a number of checks and balances are in place. They occur when police work with child protection workers when cases are first identified to make sure that child protection workers are aware of any risks that occur once a perpetrator or possible perpetrator comes to the awareness of police. Once people are charged, the courts then make a judgement about the level of risk; for example, if someone is charged and then bailed, the court makes a judgement about what conditions will apply to that bail and, if the family or the community is known to the department, what sort of risk assessment is done. We recently had a fulsome discussion around the systems that apply at child protection level to do the assessment about whether those children are at risk because they are living either with, or in the proximity of, people who have been charged or convicted.

I will also say that a preoccupation with those people who have been charged or convicted fails to identify the many areas in which children can possibly be at risk. If we think children are at risk only if they are in the proximity of people who have been charged with or convicted of sex abuse, or because they have come to the attention of the department and child protection workers, we are missing the main game. I see other members nodding their heads. Amongst parents, family members and community members, there is now a more sophisticated understanding of situations in which children can be at risk. As a government, we are keen to make sure that the community is not alarmist or paranoid, but is aware that child safety is everyone's concern. We have failed to do that in the past; we have left authorities and institutions to make their own judgements and that has resulted in high levels of abuse going unchecked. That is really what the royal commission has pointed out. Institutions that we thought we could trust could not in fact be trusted. It is not that long ago; we are not talking about decades and decades ago. These are still quite current cases in which people came to authorities and asked for assistance, and that assistance was not given.

I am not trying to disregard the question. We do what we can to ensure that, if there is a concern, the risk is properly assessed and managed. The member for Churchlands asked whether we are doing enough and if we have systems checks. That is a constant work of refinement and challenge within the department. We need to make sure that we are focusing not only on people who are convicted of and charged with offences. People within our institutions, our establishments, our communities and our families need to have a good understanding of what child safety means so that people can get on and lead good, happy lives and so that children are safe and know to come forward if they have concerns.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 440 and the HUGS line item in the "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies" table. Can the minister explain the reduction in the budget for this program in 2018–19, first by \$9 million and then by a further \$6 million in each of the out years?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The budget appropriations for the hardship utility grant scheme, not only under this government, but also under successive governments, have been a demonstration of hope over experience. They hope that the expenditure for HUGS will go down in the future, but the experience has been that they have to go back and ask for more money, and I am sure that was the case under the member's government as well. The budget estimate for that line item is just over \$1 million in the current year and into the forward estimates, but in the past it has been less. The reality is that much more has been spent on HUGS, and I think that has been well publicised. In fact, in 2017–18 there was an appropriation of about \$25 million for HUGS, which got quite a bit of publicity.

There has been an increase in the accessing of HUGS, particularly by some utility providers. Under the previous government, there was a decoupling of financial counselling for people who wanted to access HUGS. Previously, to get HUGS they had to go to a financial counsellor and get financial counselling, and then it would be decided whether they were eligible for it. Under the Barnett government, there was initially a cancelling of funding for financial counselling in the metropolitan area. That meant that people could not access financial counselling to get HUGS. In fact, some of that funding for financial counselling in the metropolitan area was reinstated, and financial counselling in the regions continued during that time. Nevertheless, even though some of that money for financial counselling in the metropolitan area was reinstated, under the previous government there was a decoupling, as I said, and people did not have to go to financial counselling to access the hardship utility grant scheme. One of the reasons there has been a big increase in the number of people qualifying for and accessing HUGS is that they can now go directly to the utility to access HUGS. Therefore, as part of the midyear review, the Treasurer announced that there would be a change in policy and people who do not hold a concession card will now have to go to financial counselling to access HUGS. We are starting to roll that out; that is just being implemented now. Anglicare will be the lead agency to help manage that. We are also rolling through the utilities that will manage that. I think the Water Corporation will be first in May and the other utilities will follow. That is for people who do not hold a concession card. The other changes are that people need to have a minimum outstanding bill of \$300 and need to have been in a debt reduction program with the utility for at least 180 days. That is to try to encourage both utilities and customers to put in place hardship measures to better manage utility bills before they can access HUGS. Notwithstanding that, we understand that the reason for HUGS is hardship and there should be some ability for people to continue to have essential services such as gas, electricity and water available to them. That is the reason for HUGS and we will continue to make sure those funds are available to people in need.

[5.20 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Just to clarify, the assumption from that explanation would be that the number of HUGS applications is increasing because there is greater access, albeit there are greater controls for people to access it in the first instance, but the figures are going down across the forward estimates. Am I misreading something?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No; I do not know whether I was clear. There has been no extension to the number of people who are eligible for HUGS; there has been no widening. In fact, under the current system, both the member and I are eligible for HUGS. Until these recent arrangements, if we went straight to the utility and said that we were having trouble budgeting, we would technically be eligible for HUGS. We are trying to put some checks and balances in the system to make the distinction between people who cannot pay their bills and people who will not pay their bills. We hope that by putting in those checks and balances, we will rein in some of the HUGS expenditure and at the same time make sure it is available to people who are in genuine need.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I understand that there is a narrowing, some checks and balances, and the modelling shows that less needs to be appropriated. At the same time, the price of water and power is going up. Does the modelling show that one cancels out the other, or is it a bit like the comment I heard at the start about hoping not to use more? Is the minister optimistic about what is going into HUGS given the increases in water and power prices?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There were changes to the financial counselling model. Initially, as I said, the Barnett government cancelled all financial counselling in the metropolitan area and there was a public backlash against that and some—not all—of that money was put back. The Labor government has now reinstated all of the money for financial counselling to the levels before the cut. However, one of the changes that arose out of that upheaval was that a financial counselling network was put in place in the metropolitan region. Most of the financial counselling in the metropolitan area is managed by UnitingCare West and Anglicare, although there are a couple of other small contracts. Regional areas are not part of this system. As a result of this financial counselling network, a bit more data has been collected about what is going on with people experiencing financial hardship, what their needs are and what we need to do to address some of those needs. We are hoping to bring some of that effort to bear in the HUGS applications. As I said, a result of the decoupling of people having to get HUGS via financial counselling was that people went directly to the utilities to access HUGS. I am concerned that the utilities are not rigorous enough in interrogating customers about whether there is genuine hardship and whether they just get referred straight to access their annual HUGS entitlement. We are doing that work to make sure there are, as I said, some checks and balances for people who do not hold concession cards. Now people need to go to financial counselling, so there is some genuine assessment of whether they are experiencing financial hardship. We will continue to work with the financial counselling network and the utilities themselves to drive change. The member may have seen that the water authority has put in place some changes and has started to better understand the needs of its customers—for instance, why people are getting huge water bills and what its customers' needs are. The authority has taken that on board and started to reduce the number of people who have had their water cut off or been threatened with having it cut off just by better understanding the nature of the high bills and debts that were

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being accumulated by those customers. We would like to encourage utilities to continue to do that and work with the financial counselling network so that we can best direct resources for people to where they are needed.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: With all this collection of data, where is it being collected and is it available to the public? Is there data about the geographical areas in which people are accessing HUGS and their prevalence? Can that data be shared?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, that information has been available publicly and it is asked for regularly in the Legislative Council. We have those full figures for 2017–18 and even by quarter. I think they are compiled by region and then by utility. It has been well documented that there has been an increase in the number of people accessing HUGS payments. As I said, we will continue to make sure that people in genuine hardship can access that assistance, but we will look at what sorts of checks and balances we can put in place. Technically, the member and I can access HUGS, so how do we make the distinction and make sure the money is going to where it is best needed?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have not seen that data; my apologies. Does it include a geographical breakdown?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, it is by region.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is it broken down by development commission regions?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I think it is. The member might be interested.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is by development commission regions; that is okay.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is by region, yes.

[5.30 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the department's asset investment plan outlined on page 437 of budget paper No 2, which provides the necessary infrastructure for family and domestic violence clients and a range of other services for children in care. Can the minister provide an explanation for the line item at the bottom of the table that highlights that almost all of the department's asset investment plan is funded from asset sales?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I think it is probably an example of these budget papers being a little challenging to disaggregate across ministerial responsibilities. Where we see huge numbers, it is attributable to the Department of Housing, and where we see smaller numbers but people doing incredibly good work, it will be attached to my portfolio responsibility! To answer the question, my understanding is that most of that is in relation to Department of Housing or Housing Authority work.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Is the minister still able to provide us with a list of what assets are intended for disposal in her portfolio?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There is none in my portfolio; it is all in relation to the Department of Housing or Housing Authority.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I refer to the first dot point under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" on page 416. How many of the 5 500 staff across the six former entities will no longer be employed in the minister's department after the amalgamation?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The amalgamation had taken place prior to these budget papers being prepared. The number incorporates the current Department of Communities and is the current rough figure of the number of staff employed in the department. We are working through the targeted voluntary severance scheme and trying to work through that across government to ensure that any efficiencies, particularly in machinery-of-government changes, that could be realised are realised, but that there is protection of frontline staff, particularly those doing the work of child protection that we have been talking about.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I return to "Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators" on page 421 and refer to the line item relating to the proportion of children in the CEO's care with comprehensive care planning undertaken within set time frames. They are all percentages. Is it possible to know what that means in real terms, in terms of numbers of children?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, I do not know whether some of that is in the annual report. I would not have it here.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am happy to take it as supplementary information if that is possible.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am not trying to avoid the question but it will be in the annual report. The figures that are here relate to the full financial year and so are about the effectiveness indicators in relation to budget and actual. I would be reluctant to indicate that I could give the numbers underpinning that part way through the year. I do not know that they are going to be that helpful. These are not estimates.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: They are actual.

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Ms S.F. McGURK: They are actual. I am not sure what is in the annual report as I do not have it with me but I can see that someone here does have the report. No, the annual report has the percentages as well. The Department for Child Protection and Family Support annual report 2016–17 states that the result in 2016–17 indicates that 80 per cent of children in the CEO's care had up-to-date care planning in place as at 30 June 2017 and this was below the target and the 2015–16 result. The lower result is predominantly due to the implementation of the needs assessment tool in December 2016 and the department's focus to ensure that every child in the CEO's care had their individual needs assessed through that new assessment tool by February 2017. The needs assessment tool is part of the department's out-of-home care reforms, to which I referred earlier in terms of some of the work that had already commenced when we took office, and identifies the individual needs of the child across all dimensions of the child's life, which are the same dimensions addressed in the care plan. The effort required to complete this activity during 2016–17 has adversely impacted on the department's performance against this indicator.

The CHAIR: Minister, I think the member was asking for a number.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I was getting carried away reading from the annual report. That illustrates the work that underpins not only how we work towards the assessment, but also the variance that can occur while those assessments are being refined. The annual report discusses the reform that occurred. The director general points out, quite rightly, that every child has a care plan so that we know at any time how many children are in the department's care. There will be an exact number, but it is about 4 800 at the moment. Ms Tang might like to supplement my ability to answer this question.

Ms J. Tang: The fact that we have not met the target is something that we are driving within the organisation; that every child needs to have a care plan. That is certainly something that we are trying to drive. The problem is that we cannot just take it as a percentage of the numbers of the volume of children moving through because we might have just under 5 000 in care now, but some are moving out of care and others are coming in. There might be 1 000 children who come into the system and 1 000 children who go out. It is just being clear on what we collect that number on. We cannot necessarily take it from today and say it is 85 per cent; we need to do it over the year. It is another case where we are not saying that the care of that child has not been put in place. One of the driving matters for us is to say to our staff that if it is not written down, it has not happened. Sometimes they do the care planning, they work with the families, the child is safe, but they have not got to write the plan down and formalise it and get it signed off. We are trying to instil in them that if they have done the work and the child has had a care plan and is in a safe environment, they need to document it, because it has not happened if they have not documented it. That is good practice and is something that we are driving on a number of key performance indicators across the system.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: My understanding, and I am happy to be corrected, is that there is a time frame within which a child has to have a care plan implemented. With the transition to the new system, has there been a —

Ms S.F. McGURK: Disruption.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, has there been a disruption for kids who have had a care plan in settling them with a carer or deciding whether they will go back to their parents? How has that impacted?

[5.40 pm]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Does the member mean the machinery-of-government changes to the department?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: No, sorry, not the machinery-of-government changes. I cannot remember the title that the minister gave it earlier—they were being transitioned to a new system.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The needs assessment tool?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, that is the one! My apologies.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Some of the program was in place when we came to government—the needs assessment tool was just being implemented in February 2017. It was a challenge to manage that transition in the department at that scale. That is why the statement I read from the annual report indicated that the percentage is lower, because a decision was made that all children within the care of the department at that time needed to be assessed within a certain period using the new tool. It was quite challenging to manage that sort of change when we were trying to improve systems and questioning whether we had the best tools to use, while we are working with however many regions and however many staff and trying to maintain the integrity of the system while work goes on.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: At an individual level, if a child had a care plan and the new tool was brought in but they were part-way towards being rehomed or going into foster care, would it disrupt or change the work that had been done or the time line they would follow? Was there any disruption in their care in coming to an arrangement for a more

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permanent solution for the child, whether they would be returned to their parents or a foster family, or retained by their current carer? Sorry, I am not being particularly clear.

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, I understand the question. As a result of the new needs assessment tool, it may be that a different judgement could be made about where a child would be placed, but I imagine that would be the exception rather than the rule. That was the point of having a new and hopefully improved needs assessment tool—to re-examine whether the best plan had been put in place for a child and whether the best judgement had been made about the arrangements they were in. The transfer of that work in the reform process took a huge effort. It commenced under the previous government and we continued with it. We did not interrupt the work that was occurring and we are now able to add to it with machinery-of-government changes and reforms to the department at a more senior level. Frankly, as Minister for Child Protection and regarding the system, I hope that we are open to continually refine those tools and how we work. As I said, doing that and maintaining the integrity at such a scale is something we have to be careful of because if changes are made all the time, then it could be compromised or will be at risk of being compromised. If that sounds a bit theoretical, the changes occurred just as I became minister and Emma White was still director general, so the transfer of the needs assessment tool and the like was just being bedded down as I took office.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I refer to page 440 of budget paper No 2 and the eighth and ninth line items, “Grandcarers Assistance (Respite) Program”, and “Grandcarers Support Scheme.” Can the minister explain what the funding for the grandcarers assistance respite program was for and why it has now ceased?

Ms S.F. McGURK: This refers to the contract that the Barnett government entered into with Wanslea Family Services. It is a community organisation that does quite a bit of work with the Department of Communities. A contract was entered into in 2013. I do not know whether the member has had any experience with it in his electorate, but I have and I know that many other members have. The program was essentially for parents who, for a variety of reasons, are now caring for their children’s children. There are opportunities but there are enormous challenges too. Some of those challenges include the amount of support that is given to grandcarers. I do not know the numbers but some grandcarers are given formal responsibility for their grandchildren through the child protection system. If the department makes a judgement that the children are no longer safe with their parents, they will go before the courts and are then given orders and the grandparents can be deemed to be responsible for them, essentially like foster carers. As a result, they get assistance equivalent to what foster carers get for looking after children. For other grandcarers—I think it is the majority—the arrangement is much more informal. As a result of mental health issues, drugs and alcohol, justice issues if parents are incarcerated, homelessness issues and the like, the grandparents step in and decide to care for their grandchildren in a much more informal way. They are given some assistance by the state but, by comparison, it is not much at all. Wanslea was commissioned to try to give them a bit of support through local support groups. One group in Fremantle meets every quarter to have a cup of tea and talk about some of their experiences. Wanslea was contracted to help assist the group and provide a bit of extra support. It was always a finite program and it is due to expire in June 2018. However, for grandcarers who follow the informal pathway I described, support is provided by the state government in an annual amount of \$400 for the first child and \$250 for each subsequent child, and that will continue. For children who are under the formal care of their grandparents as a result of going through the Children’s Court and getting formal orders, their support will also continue.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I understand that the grandcarers support scheme will continue, which, as the minister pointed out, is an amount of money allocated to grandcarers for the first child and a lesser amount for each subsequent child in their care. The minister mentioned that the Wanslea contract offered grandcarers an opportunity to come together once a month to share experiences. Were any other parts of this program provided to grandcarers? That is only the respite program.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right; that contract was entered into in 2013 for five years. We need to make sure that some support continues for these carers. I know some of them in my electorate and I have met others since becoming minister. I am very conscious of the herculean efforts they put in looking after kids as they were hoping to put their feet up and they now have to manage these children. Sometimes grandcarers have to deal with their adult children who may not be able to look after their own kids. We will need to ensure ongoing support for those grandcarers. I am trying to read the details of that work as I talk. The annual grant provided to Wanslea included some counselling, training and workshops, and a bit of home help and tutoring for grandcarers and their grandchildren.

[5.50 pm]

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The training and more help with tutoring were the types of services provided under the respite program. Given the program will not now be funded, will the services continue?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We will make every effort to make sure that some assistance will continue for people who have been getting it through either the Department of Communities or Education. I have said that I am very conscious of the work of grandcarers, particularly those who do not have formal care arrangements or formal

Mr Sean L'Estrange; Ms Simone McGurk; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Mia Davies; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski; Mr Yaz Mubarakai; Ms Cassandra Rowe; Chair

responsibility for the children they care for, and they need support. There has been quite a bit of public discussion, in WA and nationally, about the need to support those people. They often feel frustration because of not only the distinction between the support given to people who have gone through the court system to get the equivalent of foster payments, but also the federal government support like family assistance payments et cetera that is normally paid to parents is not paid to them. They feel completely bereft of assistance and that they have been left to pick up the pieces of caring for young people. To answer the member's question, we will do everything we can to make sure people are not worse off as a result of that finite program coming to an end in 2018.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: On the same table on page 440 of the *Budget Statements* and in reference to Our Watch, is that funding spent in Western Australia or elsewhere?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Our Watch is a national organisation that we committed to sign on to as part of our package of election commitments to deal with the high level of domestic violence in Western Australia. Our Watch is a national organisation. Its origins were a partnership between the Victorian and federal governments to look at primary prevention approaches to deal with family and domestic violence. I hope it is obvious to the member and most people that part of our response to domestic violence has to be to deal with it after it happens, but we also need to stop it from occurring in the first place. That can occur. There is no reason for the current high levels of domestic violence. Every state and territory in the country except New South Wales, as well as the federal government, are members of Our Watch. Some of the tools it employs have been lessons learned in, for instance, public health campaigns such as the many years of many-pronged approaches to reducing smoking levels or the seatbelt-wearing campaign that was adopted over many years or trying to get people to not drink and drive or road-safe campaigns. Our Watch has looked at a range of targets and approaches to try to drive behavioural change. Our Watch has committed to trying to learn some of those lessons to prevent family and domestic violence. The board is chaired by Natasha Stott Despoja, a former senator, and includes a range of bipartisan people who are associated with both sides of politics, as well as other experts. A few Western Australian women have sat on the board of Our Watch and participated in those deliberations.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Can the minister outline what the program has delivered in Western Australia since it was first funded last year?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No specific programs have been rolled out in Western Australia, and Our Watch does not deliver programs. It has looked at different work that has been picked up in education programs, but it does not offer specific programs. The organisation examines and promotes primary prevention in the area of family and domestic violence. I have said that this state is not alone in trying to deal with this. I think there are enormous benefits in us joining in the national effort to try to drive behavioural change around domestic violence. WA ran a primarily online social media campaign last November called 16 Days in WA. I think the member might have been on the steps of Parliament House, as were other members from both sides of Parliament, when we stood with the then Governor and the Premier to say that we are against domestic violence. We used some of Our Watch's resources to help inform that campaign. It has done work with a local organisation in Geraldton called Desert Blue Connect that works with the local community. The member for Geraldton is aware of some of this work. It is starting to lead a campaign in the community of Geraldton to try to get ambassadors to stand up against domestic violence. I know it used some of the resources and work informed by Our Watch to help with that campaign.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Are any staff within the minister's department involved in Our Watch?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No. The amount detailed under the line item that the member mentioned—in 2018–19 it will be \$123 000—is our membership to Our Watch. Western Australians are on the board; Dorinda Cox is a Western Australian who might still be on the board. She was previously; I am not sure whether she still is. She is an Aboriginal Western Australian. Western Australians are involved, but the state government does not pay for them. That amount covers our membership of Our Watch.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 5.59 to 7.00 pm