

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND
FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

2015–16 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARINGS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 24 JUNE 2015**

**SESSION THREE
DEPARTMENT FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND FAMILY SUPPORT**

Members

**Hon Ken Travers (Chair)
Hon Peter Katsambanis (Deputy Chair)
Hon Martin Aldridge
Hon Alanna Clohesy
Hon Rick Mazza**

Hearing commenced at 4.00 pm

Hon HELEN MORTON
Minister for Child Protection, examined:

Ms EMMA WHITE
Director General, examined:

Mr STEVE GLEW
Executive Director, Service Standards and Contracting, examined:

Ms PHILIPPA BEAMISH BURTON
Chief Finance Officer, examined:

Ms KAY BENHAM
Executive Director, Policy and Learning, examined:

The CHAIR: On behalf of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I would like to welcome you to today's hearing. I firstly ask the witnesses: have you read, understood and signed a document headed "Information for Witnesses"?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Witnesses need to be aware of the severe penalties that apply to persons providing false or misleading testimony to a parliamentary committee. It is essential that all your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. The hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private either of its own motion or at the witness's request. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question. Government agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting Parliament to scrutinise the budget papers on behalf of the people of Western Australia, and the committee values your assistance with this.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: I just ask the witnesses to wait until the red light comes on before answering any questions if you are invited to by the minister or by me. Unless there are any opening statements anyone wants to make, I will go straight to questions. Do members want to indicate who would like to ask questions? I will give the call to Hon Stephen Dawson.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Minister, I refer to page 418 under "Spending Changes" and the line item "Discontinuation of Financial Counselling Services". Obviously, it has been a controversial decision. Is the minister able to provide me with a list of those organisations that are currently being funded to provide these services that will no longer be able to do it?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Do you want me to go through them by name?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No, do not read them. Can you provide a list to me? Table it or provide it as supplementary.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I think we might have it here and it can be tabled.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I do not want to waste an hour reading out the names.

Hon HELEN MORTON: That is fine; that can be tabled.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Great; thank you.

The CHAIR: Can we get that given to one of the staff? Thanks.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Minister, in relation to financial counselling services, previously a consumer that was experiencing hardship needed to go to a financial counsellor before then being able to access HUGS or the hardship utility grant scheme. What will be the process post 1 October 2015? Who will now undertake those assessments to see if people can access HUGS?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will just start by saying that by far the majority of HUGS requests for subsidy has been through the financial counselling services rather than to the utilities themselves—by far—probably in the vicinity of about 75 per cent.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: You are saying 75 per cent went through the counsellors—sure.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Through financial counsellors, rather than directly to the utilities. The utilities will have the capacity to provide the service of getting a subsidy directly, so people will be encouraged to go directly to the utilities rather than through financial counselling. The way that that can happen—I will just check that I have got this right—is people will be able to be directed to the utilities by the metro-wide telephone helpline service in terms of how they can go directly to the service. The largest service provider at the moment is the statewide telephone helpline. They, obviously, are quite practised at assisting people over the telephone to go and access those services.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: This statewide helpline, is that run by DCPFS, or is that actually financial counsellors—FCA?

Hon HELEN MORTON: No, it is run by the Financial Counsellors Association of WA. We fund them to do that. The commonwealth also funds them, so they have joint funding from the state and the commonwealth to provide that telephone counselling service.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Given that we are getting rid of 47 staff in agencies who will miss out as a result of this decision, are we beefing up this statewide service? Are we providing more staff and more funding to them to take up the slack?

Hon HELEN MORTON: We are certainly doing that in the first instance while we work with the WA Council of Social Services to look at the new metro-wide service. We had already indicated that we would increase their FTE by two FTE to expand the capacity of that telephone counselling service. In the meantime, we have agreed to work with WACOSS to look at what the new metropolitan-wide service would look like. It could have a combination of face to face, although I expect that that will be the minor part of what the state is going to fund, as well as telephone counselling, as well as web and online services.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That two FTE, what does that equate to in terms of monetary value? What is the extra funding that the FCA is getting?

Hon HELEN MORTON: There is a figure for that. It is about 170 grand.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Minister, can I ask why is it only metropolitan services that are ceasing as of 1 October? As a regional member, I am very happy that regional services are continuing, but why have you focused only on metro areas; why not across the state?

Hon HELEN MORTON: There are a number of reasons. One of them is that the socioeconomic disadvantage for people living in the country is greater than in the metropolitan area, on average. The second is the disparity of need across something like, for example, in your electorate say in the East Kimberley versus what might be needed in Bunbury, there are completely different requirements of need there. The third is that, as you are aware, we have got the remote service delivery strategy underway at the moment, which is going to pick up on a number of ways in which

current services going into regional and remote communities are going to change. I was quite adamant that services should not be withdrawn from the regions while that consideration around how better to provide those services needs to take place, and this is one of those services.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Minister, by way of supplementary can I be provided with a list of the organisations in regional WA that are being funded to provide financial counselling services?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Surely.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: And also the amounts of funding that they receive?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Surely.

[Supplementary Information No C1.]

[4.10 pm]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Minister, if I can ask about the hardship utility grant scheme. I am also keen to get a sense of the total value of HUGS grants that have been paid to the utilities over the past few years. I do not imagine you would have that information there.

Hon HELEN MORTON: What if I have?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Excellent.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I do not think I have, either! But I would just say that I know that I have provided that information to you on a regular basis, as you have asked it, but I have some information here that I believe is precisely what you are looking for. From August 2008 to June 2009, 2 687 approvals; the total amount of the grant was \$859 582, and the average grant amount was \$320. From 2009 to June 2010, there were 6 702 —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Minister, not to be rude, but I will stop you there.

Hon HELEN MORTON: You do not want me to take the time to answer the question?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I want the amounts to each agency —

Hon HELEN MORTON: Broken down by the different utilities, agencies?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Absolutely.

Hon HELEN MORTON: What if we have that as well? It is going to take a long time to read all those out as well.

The CHAIR: The member may want them answered in longhand, but if you have them in a document form, the committee would appreciate them being tabled.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I have them by Synergy, Horizon, Water Corporation and the total. Is there anything else you would like?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is perfect, so I am happy with the Chair's suggestion that they be tabled.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I think we might table both those documents so that you have them in total and —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: You have been very helpful this afternoon, minister; I appreciate it!

Hon HELEN MORTON: I can tell you that we are here to serve you!

The CHAIR: Let us keep it that way throughout the afternoon, then!

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thank you, minister. Explain to me the HUGS process. The funding sits with the Department for Child Protection and Family Support and when somebody has been approved to access the funding, is that funding then shifted from DCPFS across to the utility?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I just missed the first part of your question.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The HUGS money sits with your department. When somebody's grant is approved, how does it work? Is that money then shifted across to Synergy, Western Power or Horizon? Is that the transactional process that happens?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Under the current arrangements, you mean?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes.

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is done on a quarterly basis from the utility to the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, so there is a quarterly reconciliation.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sorry, the other way around, though—it is done from you to them; is that right?

Hon HELEN MORTON: No. They total the amount that is required and they put in a —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure, but it is you who is moving the money to them. That is my question.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes; so we approve it and then we transfer the money.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: So the money leaves your bank account and goes to theirs. It seems to me that this is just a case of one area of government propping up another area of government. In this case, you are taking money away from financial counselling services, who really do provide valuable support to vulnerable people, yet you are continuing to not take money away from the utilities. Given the utilities have massive budget surpluses every year, surely it would have been fairer for government to say, "Actually, the financial counsellors need to keep doing the work that they are doing, but the utility gets the hit", so it is the utility that does not get the HUGS amount and they just have to cop it. Surely that would have been fairer; does the minister not agree?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am the Minister for Child Protection, so in this requirement to look at making sure that we get the most efficient service that we can for child protection services, one per cent of the financial counselling services are provided for people referred from the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. It seriously does not seem to be an area that should be taking priority over the services that we have responsibility for, which is to protect children and to support families to make sure that children are not brought into care. In terms of the range of people that are accessing financial counselling, and knowing that the commonwealth provides a significant amount of funding to financial counsellors across the metropolitan and country areas, and given that Child Protection has a responsibility to make sure that it is focusing and refocusing its work around child protection and support to families to stop children coming into care, this, to me, is an area that requires us to make some difficult calls from time to time about how Child Protection funding should be expended.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Granted, you are the Minister for Child Protection, but the department is the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, and it was with much fanfare that the title of the department was extended to include "Family Support". I do not remember at the time that it was purely about assisting families who have kids in care; I actually thought it was broader than that. I thought it was about supporting all families. If it is about supporting all families, this is a terrible decision, and if this department is only about providing support for families with kids in care, then let me know that that is the case now and I will make sure I am aware of that in the future.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I think you were making a comment there; I was just listening to it. I am not sure what the question is.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: To be honest, I am not, minister. Is it the case that your department only provides assistance to kids in care and to families of kids in care?

Hon HELEN MORTON: That is the priority work of our department, absolutely. It is the majority of our work and it is the work that will be the most substantial amount of our work. There is no doubt about that whatsoever.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Is that the totality; so it is only families of kids in care?

Hon HELEN MORTON: No, you know that it is not the totality, because —

The CHAIR: Order! When you were answering the question, I called the member to order, but I also ask the minister to let the member ask the question, and I will then make sure that the member lets the minister answer the question, and we will get along just fine at that point because we are all here to serve!

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Very good, Chair; apologies for the confusion. Minister, I will not labour the point, but either the minister is or is not saying that her department focuses on the protection of kids in care and provides support to their families, or it provides support to other families outside those who have kids in care.

Hon HELEN MORTON: You know it is the case that, for example, when there is an emergency, our services switch to providing emergency services to families, like when there is a bushfire, a flood or other natural disasters. Our services are the services that switch hats and become the welfare service providers to all families under those conditions. You know that.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Is that core business?

Hon HELEN MORTON: You also know that we currently run the Crisis Care centre, for example. That is a centre people can phone for any problems whatsoever. The areas of family support that we are focused on are Aboriginal student accommodation services; bereavement assistance programs; district office costs related to non-intensive family support; emergency relief management; the hardship utility grant scheme, which we hope we will not have to provide for much longer; the secondary family support network; and the Strong Families program. When I say that we will not have to provide the hardship utility grant scheme for much longer, it is intended that that will be managed almost entirely through another arrangement that will heavily focus on the utilities undertaking some of that subsidy work themselves.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thank you, minister. If you can answer my next question now, that is good, but I am happy to take the answer by way of supplementary information. Is the minister able to provide me with a summary of all the financial assistance programs that have been cut over the past three years? I understand that some of the funding has been cut from the bereavement program, and that some of the no-interest loans money has also been cut. I also think some money has been cut from family crisis. Can I ask the minister for supplementary information about all those services that have ceased in the past three years, and what they were last being funded at when —

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am absolutely certain that none of the bereavement services have been cut. There have been no cuts to the no-interest loans; none of our services in no-interest loans have been cut.

Mr Glew: Just picking up on the minister's comments, there has been no cut in the actual funding that has gone to the service providers themselves, and what has been reworked is the way that the loans can be obtained through clients.

[4.20 pm]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Has that maximum loan amount available been decreased?

Mr Glew: Not that I am aware.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Perhaps you could check that for me.

Hon HELEN MORTON: If there is a different answer from that, we will come back to you with it.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thank you.

Hon HELEN MORTON: The only thing I am aware we cut, and we did that last year or the year before—I cannot remember now—was the family crisis program. On the basis of that, we still provide a range of emergency funding for certain categories of people. We do not provide the general family crisis program, as we used to.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In terms of the funeral or bereavement program, I am aware that previously the department provided a range of assistance to people whose families have passed away who needed assistance from the department to pay for funerals. Has that service changed in the past three years?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The answer to that is no.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is great. If you are able to provide me how much has been available for the bereavement program for the past three years, and by way of supplementary the guidelines—if the department has guidelines—I would be very grateful.

The CHAIR: Are you asking for the amount made available or the amount spent, because they might be slightly different.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Chair, that was a good suggestion. I am happy to have both, please. I am after the amount that is available, but it will also be helpful for me to find out the amount that has been spent.

The CHAIR: What was spent and the guidelines. Slightly earlier they said, if their answer was incorrect, they would provide that as further information.

[*Supplementary Information No C2.*]

The CHAIR: Has the member finished that line of questioning?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: On that point I have, yes.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I want to point out that bereavement assistance is listed in the budget papers on page 428 and you will see that the budgeted amount of funding across the page for 2014–15 was \$705 000 and \$705 000 is listed there for every year up to 2018–19.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: You have pointed that out correctly, minister, but the actual in 2013–14 was —

Hon HELEN MORTON: Was \$130 more, yes.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It was \$130 000 more, actually.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am just saying that for some reason or other the actual expenditure for 2013–14 was \$830 000. For every year out from then on it is \$705 000.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: This paper in front of us does not tell us that there has been an overspend. All it tells us is that \$830 000 was spent the year before, but the budget this year is \$125 000 less. I am wondering whether the department can provide details for why \$830 000 was spent in 2013–14 and only \$705 000 is budgeted for the year after.

Hon HELEN MORTON: The director general believes that can be provided now.

Ms White: By way of explanation, bereavement assistance is provided as a function of the Children and Community Service's Act. We take an average of expenditure over the previous two years to help with our forecasting and then average it out in terms of the actual spend, which impacts on some of those variations. It is a function of our legislation so we use the average to estimate what will be required.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The legislation does not deem that it is \$705 000 a year.

Ms White: No; only that we will provide bereavement assistance under certain circumstances.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Is an amount provided to each family who seeks the assistance, or is it on a case-by-case basis? Does that include money for, say, flights, for the burial or for the funeral service?

Ms White: It is a case-by-case basis. We have a dedicated officer who manages the bereavement assistance fund and works with the local service provision district to work with that family. There are some criteria and eligibility around means testing. We also work with commonwealth providers if the family, for example, may already have sought some assistance elsewhere, so that will have a bearing on what amount is provided. We contract funeral assistance providers through our contract for service, which benchmarks prices and so forth. There is quite a formula and process that people undergo. Extensively, it is case-by-case; a little bit location-by-location, but through the contracted process with the funeral providers, that financial benchmark is done.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: If someone came to my electorate office and sought assistance, what is the process from there? My electorate office would normally have to call the minister's office to seek assistance but in the case of bereavement support, is there someone in the department they can approach locally who will raise it with your head office? What is the way forward?

Ms White: You can direct that person to any service delivery office in the state in terms of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support and/or you can direct them to head office. Certainly, the service delivery districts will do the back end of it in terms of contacting that centralised person. In fact, we get inquiries both ways and through crisis care. Sometimes people make an inquiry by telephone and they are directed to the right person. Of course, those families generally need face-to-face work as well as some of the financial accounting behind the scenes and liaison with the funeral providers.

The CHAIR: Did you say that \$705 000 is an average of the previous two years? Does that mean the year before the \$835 000, it was only \$580 000?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I do not have the budget paper for that year with me, so I cannot tell you.

The CHAIR: They are saying that is how they calculate it, so I am just trying to get a sense of —

Hon HELEN MORTON: I have not got that far back.

The CHAIR: It seems like a massive variation between the two. Are my committee members happy for these documents to be made public?

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Yes.

The CHAIR: The minister gave us the figures for the hardship utility grants from 2008 to 2014. The other document seems to be the approved grants by utility provided for the 2008–09 year. Is that what was asked for? I think the member was looking for something more up-to-date. Is that right? Were you asking for the last financial year figures?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I was after the last few years, particularly the last financial year.

The CHAIR: I am trying to work out whether that is a typographical error and it is the 2014–15 year.

Hon HELEN MORTON: We have got them all here.

The CHAIR: All right. We will make what is there public, but if we can get the full figures, we will make them public in due course.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thank you.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: In answers to questions I asked the Department of Health prior to estimates, they advised that the department spent \$65 000 on the statutory review of the Surrogacy Act. Can I ask if the Department for Child Protection and Family Support was consulted on that review?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The answer is yes.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: In Victoria, criminal record checks and child protection order checks are required for arranged parents and the surrogate mother and partner. If the checks indicate any conviction for sexual or violent offences or any child protection order, a presumption against treatment will apply. This morning during estimates with the Department of Health, the parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Health advised that there is no good reason why this cannot be implemented in Western Australia and I ask: would you support such a reform?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Are you asking for a policy view about whether we would support a reform being undertaken by Health around surrogacy? Tell me again precisely what you want.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The Victorian provision requires, if there is to be a surrogacy arrangement, that a criminal record check be done on the people involved and a check for any child protection order. It seems like a sensible reform. Given the Department for Child Protection and Family Support was consulted in the statutory review of the Surrogacy Act and, unfortunately, that review did not address this issue, I have pursued it with the parliamentary secretary this morning, and to close the loop, it would be good to get the position of the child protection agency.

[4.30 pm]

Hon HELEN MORTON: Once again, I would say that we would do anything that would enhance safety for children. I understand that we do not check the crim act record or do working with children checks for any parents under that arrangement.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: In Western Australia?

Hon HELEN MORTON: No, we do not do it at the moment.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: That is the situation at the moment, but in Victoria, it is required by law. I would be quite keen for us to implement the same thing here in Western Australia because it seems like a sensible reform. Before I pursue it with the health minister, I know what will end up happening is will go on this circuitous, tortoise-like routes of reform and they will say, “We have to consult with the department and so forth.” While I have you here, it seems like a good opportunity to find out what our view is.

Hon HELEN MORTON: It would have been a really good idea if you had just given me a tiny, weeny bit of warning about that too, so that I could —

The CHAIR: Then we would accuse him of having a dorothy, minister, and he would not want that to happen!

Hon HELEN MORTON: —look through all the considerations that might need to be taken into account.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: You might take it on notice then, minister?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Rather than take it on notice, I would just say that I would look at it as a potential amendment to the existing arrangements. The Surrogacy Act obviously does not come under child protection; it comes under the Minister for Health. It would be his decision. It would have to go to cabinet. It would have full cabinet consideration if it were to happen. Before I could give an absolute guarantee of what my position on that would be, I would need to have a broader consideration of the issues that might be raised in that process. Just off the top of my head at the moment, I cannot see what those issues would be but I would need to give consideration to those.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Mr Chairman, can I continue to pursue with regard to working with children checks?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Minister, on 8 March 2012 a report was laid on the table of the Legislative Council. It was done by the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People. It is report 8 and it is entitled “Report on the functions of the Commissioner for Children and Young People: Working with children checks”. I just draw to your attention a couple of findings in that particular report. Finding 6 states —

In Western Australia, it is appropriate for the Department for Child Protection to continue to be responsible for the administration of working with children checks as the Department’s main focus is child protection.

Finding 7 states —

There is no external audit of working with children check renewals conducted by the Department for Child Protection in Western Australia on its own staff.

The final finding, finding 8, states —

The administration of the *Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004* ... would be strengthened as a result of periodic external audits.

That led the committee to make two recommendations. The first states —

Legislative amendment to the *Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004* should be made to ensure periodic auditing of the working with children checks and renewals the administering body (currently the Department for Child Protection) performs on its own staff.

The second recommendation states —

The Minister for Child Protection should immediately request the Auditor General, or other appropriate body, to conduct an independent audit of the working with children checks conducted by the Department for Child Protection on its own staff.

I appreciate that the minister was not the minister at the time of tabling, but with that background are you able to provide the committee with an update as to what the current status is for this type of auditing of child protection working with children checks on the department’s own staff?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will ask the director general to make a few comments in a second. I would just say that the review of the legislation around working with children checks has obviously been completed. In fact I have only in this last week seen the suggested areas of where drafting instructions might need to be provided, asking me to give consideration to the various areas of amendment around the working with children check legislation. Those drafting instructions are being worked up at the moment and the department is going to brief me when that is completed. However, around the area specifically to do with the OAG, I will ask the director general to speak on it.

Ms White: Just by way of answer to your question, obviously the Auditor General’s department does do regular audits of working with children. In fact, we had one completed last year. There has been a couple of quite specific strategies that have been implemented since the report you referred to was tabled. I will just mention a few, one being an increase in the activity of the working with children’s unit around agency compliance. That includes us as the Department for Child Protection. We, in response to that, have implemented, for example, if a staff member has not sought timely renewal of their working with children card, it is treated as a disciplinary action, formally through letter, correspondence, in the same way we would treat all other disciplinary matters. We have just implemented, literally, I think it was in November last year, the new IT system for working with children where there is a lot more visibility around compliance. Also, things like working with children screening relies a great deal on information from other sources, which of course the working with children unit has no capability of altering. It comes, for example, through CrimCheck, the Federal Police and other sources. I am going to get the terminology correct—forgive me for not

being an IT person—but it is in an uneditable form. It is part of the quality assurance process of working with children. That now all coalesces into this revised system that will give much more timely, visible data on a range of QA-type issues.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Just so I have this clear, the Auditor General has done an external audit of how the agency conducts working with children checks on its own staff, and that external audit by the Auditor General was done since 2012?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes, that is correct, and carers.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I will chase up that report. That is great.

The second thing that I understand from the answers is that there has also been a statutory review of the working with children legislation and that that is currently in the minister's office for consideration and possible drafting amendments and the like.

Hon HELEN MORTON: That has actually been undertaken for a short while now. I cannot remember what year that was undertaken. What is in my office at the moment is a reconciliation by the department of all the areas of amendment that need to take place and what the intent of the amendment would be, and would I support that amendment.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: As a result of that review?

Hon HELEN MORTON: As a result of that review.

The CHAIR: I just wanted to clarify, were you just going to follow it up yourself?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Yes.

The CHAIR: You are not expecting any supplementary information?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: No, that is fine; I will follow it up myself.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can you give us a flavour of what some of those recommendations are, minister?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am just being told now that it was actually the review that was undertaken in 2011. So, some of the flavour, talking about whether, for example, three-yearly checks are necessary or whether it should go out or come shorter. I think the review suggested or made a recommendation that it could go to five-yearly renewals of those checks. I am not certain that I would support that at the moment. That is just an example of one.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is there anything to do with the eligibility criteria for actually receiving a working with children card?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes, there was.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can you tell us what it is?

Hon HELEN MORTON: No, I cannot; just off the top of my head I cannot. That particular bit related to the definition of what child-related work was.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Right; yes.

Hon HELEN MORTON: That means that people are wanting a clearer definition of what child-related work is, and therefore who might not be currently captured or who is currently captured and need not be currently captured.

[4.40 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Are you concerned that any of these changes, while they are not being made, might actually be placing children in danger?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I did not see anything that made me feel concerned in that way.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Would you be concerned if it was the case that somebody could lose their registration as a teacher but not have to report that when they apply for a working with children card?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Say that again.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: They could lose their registration from what used to be the COT—what is it called now? You get registered to be a teacher. Somebody could lose their registration essentially over a loss of confidence by the Department of Education.

Hon HELEN MORTON: For what reason, though?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Maybe somebody had charges dropped against them and that is not disclosable in the working with children application form.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I cannot be really clear what you are talking about, but if someone had a loss of confidence—I am just having a guess at what a possibility could be—because they embezzled money, for example, that is not necessarily something that would find them unable to work in another situation with children.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: But what if it was a situation that involved their interactions with children—for example, a sexual abuse accusation, where charges were dropped and the person subsequently lost their registration to teach?

Hon HELEN MORTON: We are informed of all charges, whether they are proven or otherwise. But I would just ask the director general to make a further comment about that.

Ms White: I will probably just start by saying that the department is heavily involved, as are many agencies, with the children's commissioner around a whole range of really important child-safe organisational initiatives. The working with children card is a very critical spoke to a very large wheel around really building capabilities and capacity right across every organisation for keeping children safe and, in fact, being able to identify children who perhaps are not safe. With regard to the example that you have mentioned, I would add that if—and I would assume that a teacher has already got a working with children card, as per the definition in the act—in the course of their duties, a disciplinary or order of no confidence as a result of a charge has been raised, the working with children unit is notified of that charge, as per the process. Even if that charge is dropped, the working with children unit still would find —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is for somebody who holds an existing working with children card.

Ms White: That is correct.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: If somebody was applying for a working with children card, would they have to disclose that they had lost their registration as a teacher?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: How would they be a teacher in the first place?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes; they would not be a teacher if they had lost it. You are talking about if they were working in another area other than teaching.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: They cannot work as a teacher because they have lost their registration.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes; they are not registered.

Ms White: Each individual would be a little bit different; it depends if they were interstate, overseas and so on and so forth. But all previous charges come up in the screening process. As you would be aware, the actual span of screening through the various mechanisms is a much higher standard than a traditional criminal record check, so, for that example, with a new person, if that vote of confidence and deregistration was a result of a charge, dropped or otherwise, there would be visibility on that.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So there is no change needed to the existing procedures.

Ms White: In terms of strengthening visibility on a charge in the way that we are talking, no; that is part of the process now, and that is why it can take a great deal of time, because sometimes the information that comes warrants further investigation. The working with children unit has very regular meetings with, for example, both state and federal police, where a lot of these matters are discussed. We have got a legal team that is embedded in the working with children unit, because often that calls into very complex points of law and that is part of their role, to advise and guide, which often warrants and requires further requests for information that can be very complex and lengthy processes and they can be quite simple.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I just want to make one further point about this. Whilst the working with children card system provides what I consider to be a significant degree of scrutiny around people's suitability to work with children, it should never be seen as a be all and end all in terms of the processes for recruiting people into jobs and the other processes that need to go with it. I do get a bit concerned that sometimes people believe that a working with children card is like the total safety measure that you would use around whether people are suitable to work with children. In fact, that is not the case. It is actually a part of what should be a bigger system.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes, but people have a right to expect that all the diligence is gone through in issuing that card, so if there is a hole, it needs to be exposed and changes need to be made.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I just ask the director general to make a final comment on that too.

Ms White: One of the recommendations in the report was relating to disciplinary proceedings and what part that might play in a screening process. It is really important that we get that right, because discipline means something different in each organisation and each context. But in terms of the consultations that have occurred to date with regards to the review recommendations, the proposed scope of the amendments and subsequent drafting instructions that will come, it has played a very large role in those consultations and considerations around the disciplinary in particular.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: On the same point, minister, can I confirm if you intend to close the loophole to make sure that adults who live in the same house as a family day care centre will require a working with children check by virtue of the fact that they are living and around kids who are being cared for in a family or a home environment?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It has actually occupied a reasonable amount of conversation and discussion in the office and obviously with the department and people who have been consulted. That work is still being determined. We are getting kind of like a substantial amount of consideration on both sides of that argument and we actually have not landed a position on that yet.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Do you have any sense of when you might land on the amendments on the package that has been given to you and when you might take something to cabinet with a package of amendments?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I would say that the Department for Child Protection and Family Support is not far from providing me with a recommendation on it.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is going to be great. As Hon Nick Goiran pointed out, the review happened a long time ago, so the changes have been a long time coming so we look forward to them.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I have a question about support services for children in the CEO's care on page 426. You have actually provided some information through the questions on notice mechanism prior to the hearing that helps us tease out this average cost expenditure per child for non-residential placements. The information that you provided us shows that between 2009–10 and 2013–14, that expenditure has decreased substantially from—this is adjusted for inflation—\$47 235 per child in 2009-10 to \$33 307 in the current financial year. My question is: why has that expenditure decreased so substantially?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will ask Philippa Beamish Burton to respond to that, please.

Ms Beamish Burton: I think in the previous one we provided it based on the national reporting mechanism, which has different accounting rules from the KPIs in the *Budget Statements*.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: In the answer that you provided in the three questions, it says that information on WA's out-of-home care expenditure is published in the Productivity Commission's "Report on Government Services 2015". Would you like a copy of your answer, minister?

[4.50 pm]

Hon HELEN MORTON: Just keep going, so what —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Or do you actually want me to read it out, I mean, I can give you a copy.

Hon HELEN MORTON: No, just what is your question, is what I am asking.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: My question is: why has the expenditure per child gone down, decreased?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Is that the question that we provided you an answer to in writing?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You provided an answer in writing that shows that expenditure has decreased dramatically.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Okay, but you want to know why.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: My question is: why has it decreased?

Hon HELEN MORTON: And I think that was just mentioned, but you said that you had a different answer to that.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: No, your adviser was saying that it was because of different counting methods, and she was asking me what the reference was from. I am just giving you the answer from your —

The CHAIR: It was question 16, I think, in questions on notice.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It was question 16, yes.

Ms Beamish Burton: In the average cost, overheads and our reform and expansion of residential care occurred in 2009–10, so that average cost includes a lot of overheads potentially in 2009–10. I do not have the actual reason why. As you can see, it is increasing from 2012–13, but we were going through some reform at that stage and there were overhead and capital works that were occurring at that stage in 2009–10 and 2010–11.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Right, so in those two years you were counting capital works in the expenditure per head, which you are not now?

Ms Beamish Burton: Not necessarily capital works, but sort of we were going through our reform and expansion, so there were more high-needs placements and items like that. With higher cost placements, as we are going through our out-of-home care reform now, we are looking at consolidating and having more cost-effective placements.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Right; so what about the inclusion of children with high needs? Is it possible that the 2013–14 figure does not include those children?

Ms Beamish Burton: Yes, it is non-residential. I think when we have said the high-needs placement, the data is on both. We do not disaggregate.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Okay, so are the costs associated with caring for high needs, non-residential placements included in the figures?

Ms Beamish Burton: It is included in residential placement, sorry.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: In residential placements?

Ms Beamish Burton: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Not in non-residential?

Ms Beamish Burton: Not in non-residential.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Right, so how many non-residential, high-needs children were in the care of the CEO in 2013–14.

Ms Beamish Burton: In 2013–14? I do not know if I have got it available.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Do you want to know specifically the number, or do you want to get a feel for it, because it is around about 200, but if you want the specific number, you are going to have to put it on notice.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: There is something very odd and very troubling going on here if the cost associated with providing non-residential support services for high-needs children is being accounted for somewhere different, somewhere other than in this figure under—what is it?—service 10.

Ms White: In part, the specialist fostering placements and transitional high-needs placements for children with particularly complex needs generally are met through individualised funding contracts with the community services sector and accounted for in that way. So the non-residential care, in part, is those contracts. I have the figures as of April this year listing the total number of young people in those particular high-needs placements, if that is helpful to list through?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes.

Ms White: The total in the metropolitan area is 180 children and young people; and in the country area it is 62; so the total is 242. They include children in the disability services placements specialised support; transitional high needs, as I have mentioned; and specialised fostering. They are all on individualised contracts.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: They are not included in the \$33 307 per child that you have given us for 2013–14?

Ms White: No, they are not.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Right, so can we then ask for a separate figure for those 242 children? Where are they detailed in the budget if the high-needs children have been taken out? You are not saying they have been taken out of service 10, surely?

Ms Beamish Burton: It is a different counting mechanism. The national reporting has different counting rules. In the national reporting, it is included under the residential placement figure, not the non-residential.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is that because they are all residential?

Ms Beamish Burton: It is the type of placement; if it falls within the definition under the national reporting rules. In our KPI case, it is under service 9 under high-needs placements or care arrangements. I think it is 9.3.

The CHAIR: If there is a difference in the way in which you do the accounting for the measures between yourselves and the Commonwealth Productivity Commission, is it possible to get some sort of reconciliation between the two so that we can understand for each year how the two are separately treated?

Ms Beamish Burton: We are basing the national reporting on the standardised, which different jurisdictions obviously have legislation and different inclusions in that. We have not actually done reconciliation between them both because we are capturing the client data sort of separately. I guess we could try.

Hon HELEN MORTON: But I think if we are providing the data ourselves, known on the information that we have, and we can track that information ourselves on our own data collection, the reconciliation with how the national reporting, or whatever it is, captures it, as long as it is tracked on an annual basis on their part in the same way, then that should not be an issue. But we capture that information at a state level based on the areas that we have already identified.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Minister, with respect, you might be capturing the data, but you are not putting them in the budget papers.

Hon HELEN MORTON: What part of it is it that you are looking for that we have not got?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Let us start with the 242 high-needs children who are not included in the data provided under service 10. You are saying they might be included under service 9.

Hon HELEN MORTON: They are; they definitely are.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Right, okay. So they are under service 9. What we are now looking for is the cost of each package—is that the right word? Am I using the right word?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The average cost of a high-needs child?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes, of the 242. What I want is what has been the average adjusted for inflation expenditure per high-needs child, accounted for under service 9 for those five years, from 2009–10 to 2013–14?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Okay.

The CHAIR: Will I make that C3.

Hon HELEN MORTON: No, hang on, I just want to make a comment about that. If you have a look on page 425 and go under section 9 and you go down to the “Average Cost per Day of an Exceptionally Complex Needs Care Arrangement”, that is the information that you are looking for.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes, but you see, what we are trying to reconcile, remembering that this question was originally asked about service 10, thinking that we were going to capture the high-needs children, because there is no indication in the budget that high-needs children are under service 9, we are trying to —

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am sorry, I just have to tell you that it actually states quite categorically “Average Cost per Day of an Exceptionally Complex Needs Care Arrangement.” That is a high-care needs arrangement.

[5.00 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You will see my problem if you go back to service 10 and look at the per-day figure and then try to equate the per-day figure with the numbers that you have given us in the answer to question 16. What I would like is the equivalent data in relation to those per-day figures for the 242 children who are captured in service 9. We have no 2013–14 figures there anyway, because it says “not applicable”.

Ms Beamish Burton: Like you said before, it is difference sort of data. Service 10 relates to supporting; so care planning, education planning, health planning, which does not necessarily relate to the placement. Exceptionally high needs is the cost relating to the placement and care arrangement for the child. We do not have the data to back cast it. We have got a new outcomes-based management reporting structure, so that is why we have written for 2013–14 onwards. The figure that we provided in question 16 previously includes both service 9 and service 10 costs based on our reporting to the national reporting accounting rules.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Right. In that case it must be possible, surely, for you to go back five years and pull out the figure relating to the high-needs children. They must have been accounted for.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Just the high needs?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes.

Ms Beamish Burton: It is quite hard because the rules which we are counting the client ones, we are using different rules. It would not be an accurate figure or an audited figure.

Hon HELEN MORTON: To back cast it.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: How about we try to get them as accurately as you can, and where you cannot give us an accurate figure —

Hon HELEN MORTON: Can you indicate what the purpose of it is, so that we can see whether we can get the information for you in a different way.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The purpose is that it appears that we have not got the data. If we had asked this question a year ago, those high-needs children would have been included in service 10. I think that is what your adviser has just told you, minister.

Ms Beamish Burton: Service 10 did not exist last year; it is a new structure from this year.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So service 10 has been invented this year.

Ms Beamish Burton: Services 9 and 10 are both new. Previously we had a service measure called service 1, which included just all costs added up together. If you look at—I think it is—page 19 it mentions that we were required to undertake a review of our outcome-based management structure. We have reviewed that to provide new service measures for the future, so there is transparency within what we are reporting. That is why it is a new measure for that year.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: All of which I am sure is going to be tremendously good news in about five years' time, but now when we are trying to measure what has been going on for five years and where we have ended up today, what I am asking you to do is go back and disaggregate that data. It has to be there to devise the new service. I mean, how did you decide who you were going to capture in the two new services 9 and 10? It must have been on the basis of existing data?

Hon HELEN MORTON: My problem is, forgetting about the budget papers for a moment —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: We are not allowed to do that again, minister.

Hon HELEN MORTON: — you have not actually indicated precisely what it is that you are actually looking for. If you are looking for the average cost of —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You are the first to point out that our questions have to relate directly to budget items.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am very pleased that you are the only one in the world that does it.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Only for us, not for the government members!

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am trying to help you, seriously. If you are wanting to have a look at the average cost of high-care placements over the last five years, if that is all you are looking for, then I will just check to see whether we can actually do that.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I will read you what I think the question is: what has been the average adjusted for inflation expenditure per high-needs child in non-residential placement between 2009–10 and 2013–14?

Hon HELEN MORTON: To do that information we are going to have to pull every file out for each of those high-cost-needs children. Seriously, unless you have got a specific issue that you wanted to pinpoint in that process, I am not going to ask the department to do that.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: On the same point, minister, I was at an event with you last week —

Hon HELEN MORTON: Sorry, you were what?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I was at an event with you last week, the UnitingCare West winter appeal, and the CEO raised the fact that they have a child in their care who has got a \$650 000 package per annum. On the same point that Hon Sally Talbot was asking, could you perhaps give the committee by way of supplementary information the top 20 most expensive packages for —

Hon HELEN MORTON: High-care needs children?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: — for high-care needs children, just to give us a sense of the amount?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Absolutely, yes.

[Supplementary Information No C3.]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So you cannot give us an average, adjusted for inflation?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Not for the last five years. What you are asking for is for us to find it out for the last few years and we cannot do that because you are asking us to go back and pull out information that is not there.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can you do it for 2013–14?

Hon HELEN MORTON: No, I can do it for this year, and that is what we have agreed to do.

The CHAIR: “This year” being 2015–16 or 2014–15?

Hon HELEN MORTON: For 2014–15.

The CHAIR: So we can do it for 2013–14 and 2014–15?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Okay, I will take that. If that is the best on offer, I will take that.

[Supplementary Information No C4.]

Hon HELEN MORTON: I can give the range but not going down to individual children. I can give the range of costs for 2013–14. You asked for the top 20.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: But that is a different question.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes, I know that it is. And then the other thing that we are agreeing to is the top 20 for this year.

The CHAIR: I will make the second part of supplementary information C4.

I just have one final question on all this. If you have changed the way in which you do your accounting treatments, I assume that the Productivity Commission data is based on the information that you provide, are you still in the position to be able to provide them with the information for them to be able to continue to record, or will they now need to also start to present information in a different way going forward?

Ms Beamish Burton: It is just different accounting rules. It is not comparable data from what is in our budget statement. We can provide the information that we have in regard to questions 16 and 17 and we will report in the same manner for the end of 2014–15, but when it comes to the way in which we are reporting for service 9 and service 10 of our OBM it is different accounting rules.

The CHAIR: In 2015–16 will you be able to provide the information in the format that the Productivity Commission needs?

Ms Beamish Burton: Yes.

The CHAIR: Or will you now have to provide it in a new way?

Ms Beamish Burton: No, we will provide it according to their accounting rules and we will also report our annual report and budget statements in our way as well.

The CHAIR: Is it possible when you do that to give some sort of reconciliation between the two on those years so we get a sense of the two. I assume, if you are doing both of them, you should be

able to provide some sort of reconciliation of what is in one and what is not in the other and why there is that variation; is that not the case?

Ms White: If I may, we can certainly include an explanation of where they match and they can be compared with absolute certainty and when they cannot.

The CHAIR: And what the variations are, so we can understand what the variations are.

Ms White: Yes, as we would do.

[*Supplementary Information No C5.*]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can I just finish by asking about the 242 high-needs children currently on your books in the care of the CEO? What can you give us in relation to those children? I presume that you can give us a total package cost for the 242?

Hon HELEN MORTON: At any point in time, because they obviously vary from time to time?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Today.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So you can give us that. I presume that you can give us an average because you will just divide it. What else can you give me in relation to those 242?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am not sure what else you are looking for. Are you just looking for the cost?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is it 242 today; 242 high-needs children in the care of the CEO?

Hon HELEN MORTON: They are the April figures.

[5.10 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I remember that you did say that. So they are non-residential children and there is another category of high-need children who are in residential care?

Ms White: We have 10 more children in residential care.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So, you are going to give us the total package cost of those children.

Hon HELEN MORTON: That is for non-residential. Is that the total cost of the 242 children or the total cost of each one? I do not know what you are asking me.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It is the 242 together.

Hon HELEN MORTON: The director general has a follow-up comment to make.

Ms White: This conversation is entirely why we have been embarking on out-of-home-care reform within the department. It is driven by a range of factors, but includes the growing number of children who come into care earlier and stay longer, and the nature of their behaviour is complex, requiring very specialised and individualised care. At the moment, we have a system, as we are coalescing in this discussion, that is very individual and we negotiate virtually case by case as a department with the sector around what is an appropriate care package for this young person to do with everything from therapeutic needs to practical supports in the home, what carers may or may not need by way of education, training, support, respite and so on and so forth. The platform of the work that we are embarking on in the reform is implementing a child assessment tool, which is a consistent way to assess and identify the needs of children based on a continuum one to five so that we can determine the complexity of the child. We are doing a lot of heavy lifting around the costings to raise a child in Western Australia and what are sensible benchmarking elements of care packages that can be attached to a care package after a child has been assessed. At the moment, we think we can do a whole lot better and be a lot more transparent and rigorous around, first, how we are assessing the care needs of children and, second, how we associate resource and elements of their care package. This is work we have been doing with the community services sector for well

over 12 months. We are looking to January to start to implement some of those quite significant changes for all the reasons we are coalescing around the difficulty in making sense of it. That gives us some opportunity, with that consistency, to really look at efficiency and effectiveness. We recognise that children's needs change consistently over time, and this gives us a consistent tool, which is used in other jurisdictions, to help us do that.

The CHAIR: Before I move on to the next person, I will just check with the committee that these can be made public. Those are now public, and I give the call to Hon Alanna Clohesy.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I come back to financial counselling funding for a second. How much commonwealth funding is provided to how many services in Western Australia for financial counsellors?

Hon HELEN MORTON: We have recently been informed about the commonwealth providing \$11.5 million over two years. There are 17 metropolitan services and three country services.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Can I get a list of those services by funding amount?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is on the website, but I know that is something that people do not like us to mention here. We could table this. Is that what you were asking for?

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Yes.

The CHAIR: We will take that, thank you.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: When do those funding contracts expire?

Hon HELEN MORTON: They have just been renewed in July, so I would say that they have at least two years to run.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: You are 100 per cent sure about that.

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is a two-year contract.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Are you 100 per cent sure that all of those contracts were renewed in July?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The ones that are listed there have come off the commonwealth website.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: As being renewed in July for a two-year period?

Hon HELEN MORTON: That is what they are telling us.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: When do the two phone counsellors start?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The idea is that our existing services will continue through to 30 September and the new metro-wide service will commence on 1 October for 12 months while WACOSS works with us to look at what the ongoing new financial counselling service might be.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: So, the two people to replace the 47 will start on 1 October for a year.

Hon HELEN MORTON: The 47 includes country and metro, so the services that are being replaced with the extra two FTE for the helpline do not make up the full 47. The 47 encompass country services as well.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: So the two people replace 36 staff. I move on to page 420, family and domestic violence services.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Can I just make a clarification about the two FTE. It is actually the funding that we are providing to that service provider. It is the equivalent of two FTE, but how they make use of that funding to expand the helpline, of course, is —

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: So they might have four part-time people to replace them.

Hon HELEN MORTON: No, it is more than that—if you would just not be quite so cynical about it. The issue is —

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: It is hard not to be, minister—exclamation mark.

Hon HELEN MORTON: If you would just wait! At the moment we are providing a number of FTE or a reasonable amount of funding to that organisation to do matters other than provide a telephone counselling service. Part of the negotiation that is taking place is also about getting better efficiencies for counselling out of the existing funding that is going to that organisation as well as the extra funding that is going to go to the organisation. I anticipate that we will get the equivalent of more than two full-time extra service provider areas.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Great.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am glad you appreciate it.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I refer to page 420, “Service Summary”, item 5, “Family and Domestic Violence Services”. Why is there a variation between the 2014–15 budget and the estimated actual of a million dollars? Why is there a million-dollar underspend in 2014–15 in domestic violence services there?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The Ellenbrook service is still coming online.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: So, a million dollars was budgeted for the Ellenbrook service. It was scheduled to come online in 2014–15 but has not; is that correct?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The director general will expand on that.

Ms White: Yes, it was scheduled in the way that you have outlined. We have had some delays, mainly through construction and building works, that have pushed out that time frame. We are hopeful it commences early next year. Pat Giles has been the successful service to tender and be awarded that service. Some of it is the actual Ellenbrook refuge, as you know, but also there are some outreach components that will run from another facility. We are looking at the end of January as the current estimation.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Where is the facility that the outreach services will run from? Is it from Pat Giles services or another operator?

Ms White: From Pat Giles, yes.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: So, the funding for the new Ellenbrook service is a million dollars operating expenses; is that right?

Ms White: No.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: How much of that \$1 million underspend was earmarked for the Ellenbrook refuge?

Hon HELEN MORTON: All of it was. That is the underspend, and all of it was allocated for that particular refuge.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Why is there not an extra million dollars in the budget estimate for 2015–16? It is the same amount as the 2014–15 actual, give or take a few hundred thousand. If all of the million dollar underspend was for the Ellenbrook refuge that has not come online yet—that is behind, why do not we have \$37 million in the budget estimate for 2015–16?

[5.20 pm]

Ms White: If I could clarify through the Chair, the underspend is the capital works component of the budget required. It does not reflect the total amount of the ongoing service in terms of the recurrent cost of providing that service.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: But if it was budgeted for last year and you did not use it last year, why is there still a lesser amount for 2015–16 than there was for 2014–15? Where has that million dollars gone?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Just making a correction there, this underspend here has not included capital—I will just check to make sure that is correct. It does not include capital. It is an underspend in the recurrent costs of the Ellenbrook service not coming online. Your question is that the budget for 2014–15 was \$37 000.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Million.

Hon HELEN MORTON: The estimated budget for 2014–15 is \$36 million. The budget estimate for 2015–16 is \$500 000 on top of that. Then it kicks up to \$37 000—million, sorry. They all look the same after a while: billions, millions, and thousands.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Lucky you are not the Treasurer!

Hon HELEN MORTON: I know. If you understand that the service is going to kick in about midyear, it would take about half that \$1 million and then in the year after that it goes to the full amount.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Okay, so the service is not going to commence until 2016–17?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Until January of 2016.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: But that still does not make sense. Where is the \$500 000 in the 2015–16 budget then?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is there: \$36 million, \$36.597 million.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Has the building been completed?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Almost—not quite. Just remember, this does not have any capital here.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Why then does the capital expenditure also appear in the Department of Housing's budget?

Hon HELEN MORTON: This one does not have any capital in it.

Ms White: I made an error before.

Hon HELEN MORTON: We have already corrected that. This paper here does not have any capital in it. That capital is with the Department of Housing. I think your concern is that there has somehow or other been a slippage of funding —

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Correct.

Hon HELEN MORTON: — in recurrent terms of what should have been in the budget if we were going to operate the service for a full year but there should be an extra million dollars there. But we are only going to operate it for half a year by the time it is built, so there is an extra \$500 000 there. It is budgeted to commence in January.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: So it will open in January 2016?

Hon HELEN MORTON: That is our anticipation, unless there are any further hold-ups.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I look forward to an invitation to the opening.

The CHAIR: There was a kind of silence then, was there not?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: There was nothing. I hope the two of us get an invitation.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: And the member for the East Metropolitan Region, minister.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Normally people do get invited to everything, as you know.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: No.

Hon HELEN MORTON: And some people come and some do not. I will just make this comment about a facility of this nature: I do not know what the opening may or may not involve. There may not be an opening as such, because as you know, it is very important that we do not make these

facilities—we will not be having a big launch and a big “whatever, whatever” there. I do not know quite what is going to happen.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: You do not publicise.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Yes. I am very aware of the sensitivities around that.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: If I see a photograph of Hon Alyssa Hayden with a ribbon, you will be in trouble. That is the point we are making. If you invite some of yours, make sure you invite some of ours. It is a very important service.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Hon Stephen Dawson would be able to vouch for the fact that he gets invited to almost every single thing that I go to, and he turns up.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Except I never get any invitations from child protection. I would love to go to the Ida Curtois awards or, you know. I never get an invitation.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Really? Does not get invited to the airport awards—the achiever awards.

The CHAIR: I am sorry I started this and can I conclude by saying so long as it is a lovely, quiet opening like the Butler one was, that will be good.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: That refuge will commence on 1 January 2016. Where in the forward estimates is the amount for the second refuge?

Hon HELEN MORTON: As you know, the second refuge is the expansion of the service being delivered out at Kenwick. I am not absolutely certain where it shows up at this stage, but is it a service that is funded by—what is the matter?

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Sorry, could I take that on notice where it shows up?

Hon HELEN MORTON: You want to see where the extra funding for the Kenwick service shows up?

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Yes.

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is probably not yet in here because it is not actually listed in this year’s budget.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: And it is not in the forward estimates?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Well, not until it is budgeted for. It will probably be in next year’s budget. That is at a later stage, still, than this one at Ellenbrook.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: So it is not budgeted for yet; is that right?

Hon HELEN MORTON: And, of course, if the funds can be found internally, it will not show up in the budget at all because it will be internally funded.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: What is the budget for the new, second refuge?

Hon HELEN MORTON: As I said, I do not have that at this stage.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: What are the anticipated costs?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Of the additional funding? I do not have that at my fingertips yet.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Can I take that on notice?

[Supplementary Information No C6.]

The CHAIR: Are we talking about the capital or the recurrent costs?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is approximately \$375 000 additional from what is currently being spent in that particular service.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I will look for that bubble in the next set of —

The CHAIR: I am just trying to clarify, were we talking about capital or recurrent costs?

Hon HELEN MORTON: No, recurrent.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: No, because my next question was would you be surprised to learn that the Department of Housing does not have expenditure for a second, new refuge in its budget at all?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is progressing. It is a redevelopment of a service that they are obviously moving from one site to another. So whether that funding has been found from an internal process, I do not know. But that is obviously something that needs to be taken up with Housing and the organisation that runs it.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I did take it up with Housing at the estimates hearing last night, and they said that the capital expenditure in the budget is for the Ellenbrook refuge. There is nothing in the budget for any capital expenditure for another refuge.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I note that it is being run by the Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service and that they are relocating from one place to another, out to Maddington, with an expanded service to take on a substantial number of extra families and larger family groups. I have had recent discussions with the facility. Obviously, I know the site and I know the planning work has been done. So the funding has been secured but I cannot tell you precisely how that is happening because it is not actually our purview to be worried about the capital works. It is more that we are interested in the recurrent funding that goes with that.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Okay. I would be worried about the capital works if I was planning a service to go somewhere and there was not any money in the budget for that service to be there. I would be worried.

Hon HELEN MORTON: As I am saying, it is actually progressing.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Okay. I will probably take it up with the Minister for Housing. I will double-check with him again though; I will. In terms of the budget for domestic violence services for 2015–16 —

[5.30 pm]

Hon HELEN MORTON: Just tell me what page you are on again, please.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I am on page 420, on division 36, part 8, the service summary at the bottom of the page, line item 5.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Right.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: It is the same one we have been talking about. How many refuges will that fund for 2015–16; and what other services will that fund?

Hon HELEN MORTON: What other services over and above the refuges?

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Yes.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will ask the director general to comment.

Ms White: Apologies, I am having trouble locating the correct figure.

The CHAIR: While we are just getting the answer, are members happy for this to be made public?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes.

The CHAIR: That will be public. That is the federal-funded financial counselling services.

Ms White: Apologies, it is approximately 37 refuges. We are having a paper malfunction. I do apologise.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I am happy for that to be taken as supplementary in the interests of time.

Ms White: Apologies again for the delay. The department provides funding for family domestic violence services. In 2014-15 this included 38 accommodation support services for women and children escaping family domestic violence. These services usually were funded through the joint commonwealth–state National Affordable Housing Agreement. There are six Safe at Home and five domestic violence outreach services as part of that funding partnership. Of course, these services, the Safe at Home and the outreach, are funded through the joint commonwealth–state National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. We also have 22 family domestic violence counselling, advocacy and support services funded currently through the state government.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Thank you very much for that. What is the vacancy rate across women’s refuges today?

Hon HELEN MORTON: We do not have it for today, sorry.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Can you take that on notice?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No C7.*]

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: The national partnership agreement, when does that expire?

Ms White: On 30 June.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Can I go to page 428 and the line item “Total Cost of Services” for child protection and family services? That has increased by about 3.8 per cent for the total cost of services for child protection and family services, with \$16.5 million funding or 2.7 per cent of the total cost of services allocated for the growth in demand of services as a result of the increased demand pressures associated with delivering child protection services. While an increase in the funding for Western Australia’s children in state care is welcome, the 2.7 per cent increase is well below the growth in the number of children in the CEO’s care; is that correct?

Ms White: Yes, although I would add that part of the demand model that establishes the increase factors in the projected growth of children in care; so there is not a direct correlation in the way that you have described it. It is built into the demand model.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I refer to page 419 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. The second dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency refers to the rate of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal children coming into care, and it stresses that the rate of non-Aboriginal children is slowing. It discusses the over-representation of Aboriginal children and points out that now 52 per cent of all the children in care are classified as being Aboriginal. That is obviously not the department’s fault. What the department is doing with all children is picking up the pieces of failures elsewhere within our society, but it is still a staggering figure and something that causes concern for everybody. Is there something that can be done in a targeted way to, firstly, reduce the number of people coming into care; and then probably as a second question that you might want to take on board, once kids come into care to ensure that they can firstly stabilise and hopefully get out of care at the earliest possible opportunity, or are we really then tapping into that bigger tapestry that we have yet to solve?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will just make a couple of comments and then I will probably ask the director general to talk in a little more detail on it. The number of kids coming into care generally—the rate of children coming into care—has reduced over the last four or five years. There are still more children coming into care than are leaving care, but the rate at which they are coming into care has actually reduced. I think in this last 12 months, it was the first time that there were more Aboriginal children in care than non-Aboriginal children in care. It is a great concern to us and it is a concern to the community generally that the rate for non-Aboriginal children has dropped off

quite quickly whereas the rate for Aboriginal children coming into care is increasing. The department is spending quite a lot of time and effort at this stage on looking at ways to minimise that or to see what can be done to reduce it, and also to make sure that those Aboriginal children who are in care actually get the best possible care that we can provide them. I will just ask the director general to expand on that a little bit.

[5.40 pm]

Ms White: The disproportionate number of Aboriginal children and families across the child protection jurisdiction is deeply concerning. It is a concern shared by both the Aboriginal community and the entire service sector. Our department is often a downstream agency, if you like, as you have articulated. I personally chair and, as a department, lead a range of interagency forums and initiatives to try to orientate and target as best we can at the earliest point families, and certainly Aboriginal families, that are falling into strife so we can do a sensible intervention. In terms of specific things that we are doing—it has been identified quite recently again as an absolute strategic priority for us as an organisation—we have formed a specific steering group led by the Aboriginal engagement coordination executive director and we are looking at a range of things that we can do in addition to what we do. I will highlight a couple of them.

We have Aboriginal practice leaders in every service delivery district in the state. They primarily look specifically at the practice of the department. When families, as you say, start to work with the department, we can have senior oversight and input so we are working in the most effective ways we can. That Aboriginal practice leader in partnership with other senior staff broker important partnerships in the community, particularly with Aboriginal-controlled organisations, where I think we can do a lot more and better work from engaging in a partnership. Aboriginal-controlled organisations may, for example, choose to become service providers in the child protection out-of-home care space or, in fact, we can collectively bring our skills and knowledge to the table so we can better work with Aboriginal families. We have a range of Aboriginal cultural learning strategies happening in all service delivery districts. All staff are required to do mandated and ongoing training about not only cultural awareness, but practically how to enact the very best work with families. We have a Signs of Safety developmental project in train, where we are looking at re-prosecuting, developing and growing our Signs of Safety practice specifically for Aboriginal families and children in Western Australia. We have had a couple of more recent successes that we would like to build on, where we have looked at the WA state government Aboriginal economic participation strategy and at how we are managing our contracts to best effect in terms of engaging the right services that we believe can better support.

I am sorry, if I can continue on. This is our agency's number one priority in terms of working better in the community before children come into care and certainly when Aboriginal children come into the care system, making sure that we are doing everything we can to successfully return them safely home, or if in fact they cannot do that, we make the very best effort to place them with family, direct family and/or, through the placement principle, other Aboriginal people, and certainly make sure, through our care planning process, cultural plans and so on and so forth are up to date and are of good quality and children are kept connected to family and kin.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I know the department is doing good work; there are many departments doing good work. There is education, focusing particularly on Aboriginal kids; there is the justice system; there is the detention system; there is health; there are federal government agencies; there are NGOs—all involved. Unfortunately, invariably in almost all of those areas, Aboriginal children do not do as well as their non-Aboriginal counterparts. How much coordination between agencies is there in service delivery? I do not mean at a ministerial level where there is a council, but actually on the ground in service delivery. How much coordination is there in delivering those services, either in remote communities or in regional or metropolitan communities?

Ms White: In short, a lot—a lot of collaboration and coordination. That occurs in a couple of ways: around an individual child or family that comes into contact with the human services system—very rarely is a family involved with one agency alone. We have StrongFamilies programs, for example, that are designed to enhance that collaboration around an individual family. We have also got a range of very prescribed human service coordination forums, from child safety directors group at a DG executive level right through, for example, in every location in Western Australia, including some of the remote communities where we have multifunctional facilities. The department, in partnership with the police, health, education, other community services sectors, coordinate what we call a child safety team meeting. It is a proactive strategy for agencies to come together to not only talk about those young people and their families that we are already aware of, but to have an eye to those who we are starting to have some concern about it. There is a lot of effort that goes into collaboration and coordination. I would suggest that the effort does not always equate to better outcomes for children in families. I think what you are touching on is communities, families and individuals resetting some pretty substantial norms around violence and drug and alcohol misuse and so on and so forth, but I can certainly attest to a great deal of collaboration. We never do it alone.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: That is heartening, because at the end of the day no-one questions the effort or sincerity of anyone involved in this space; it is just frustrating that it does not appear as though that always leads to results, and certainly on a statistical basis does not appear to do so. Let us hope we can keep working on that collaboration to get it to happen.

Another area I wanted to touch on—I do not have that much time, unfortunately—at page 425 there is an explanation of significant movements at point 9, “Care Arrangements for Children in CEO’s Care”. There are some efficiency indicators, “Average Cost per day”, of various types of childcare arrangements. Initially, just so I can get a handle on this, there are no direct comparators available either for 2013–14 or for the budgeted 2014–15. Does that mean these are new efficiency indicators that have been introduced or they have they been tweaked in some way? Why are there no previous comparable figures?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: We have just spent hours on this.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Relax.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: You have had a good shot.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: You have had a good go at it. Evidently there is no answer that was divined. I am allowed to ask questions.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I think the point that Hon Sally Talbot is making is that, again, it is a new outcome indicator. It is not the same as the one Hon Sally Talbot was looking at, but it is the same reason that we were required to look at some new outcome indicators, and this is one of the new ones. That is why you cannot go back.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I must say I welcome them, because it should not always be a dollar amount because you can actually increase the average dollars per day, whichever measure you use—average cost per day. You can increase them for very good reasons: because of targeted initiatives; because you are tweaking things and making sure you are getting the right outcomes because you are outcomes based. I do not think there is any harm in publishing these average cost figures, so I welcome that.

Between 2014–15 and 2015–16, three of the four tend to stay around about the same dollar amount; there is some slight difference but it is really statistically irrelevant. The average cost per day of an exceptionally complex needs care arrangement goes up significantly per day between the estimated actual in this current financial year and the budgeted estimated actual in 2015–16. At the same time I am told by the notes to these accounts that the actual exceptionally complex needs care arrangement cases are also going up, so it is not a matter of divvying up the existing pool over less

cases. We have got more cases and more money per case. Why is that happening? Are new initiatives being introduced?

[5.50 pm]

Ms White: In part, it is both. For a number of years we have tracked young people captured in the exceptional, high and complex needs care arrangements that we are discussing. They are getting more expensive. It is, in part, driving some of the work we need to do to create a more sustainable system in the out-of-home care reforms. One young woman in that program at the moment is costing about \$1.4 million a year. Some of her behaviours are intense, pathological and acute in terms of self-harming. The ratio of staff and carers that is required to care for her—it changes from day to day and week to week—can drive the cost up and down. But without doubt, as you are outlining, we are spending more on more young people in this area.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Can I just add that there has been a 42 per cent growth in this type of placement over the past two years. These placements have cost the department almost \$35 million this financial year. To date, that is an increase of \$6.5 million over 2014–15. It is of concern that that is happening and the complexity of children that are being placed in the care of the CEO and the responsibility for the state government to undertake this work. People have said, and I agree with them, that it is probably the most complex and difficult area of public administration to undertake because these children, and they are children, have a right to live as good a life as we can possibly provide them and not be in some way incarcerated or detained in some facility in the absence of them having committed any crime, for example. Providing the right level of care and support for these children in the community is very, very expensive and becoming more so, and there are more children in that category.

Ms White: If I could add to that, the other driver to some of those costs is, in part, the public expectation and I think our responsibility as a department that we are really supporting the safety of the community and the safety of these young people in a way that we have not historically. Part of the care package is absolutely an eye to keeping the community members safe, particularly when quite aggressive or sexualised behaviours might be displayed by the young person and, in addition to that, and they often co-exist, harming themselves. This is a new, emerging and intensifying trend.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I understand that. Just those figures —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Mr Chairman, I have been sitting patiently for a very long time.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: We have had two hours and for one and a half hours, you have been having a go. I have only had a go for 10 minutes.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: You have been on for 25 minutes.

The CHAIR: No, he has not been on for 25 minutes.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I have not.

The CHAIR: He went on at 5.36 pm. I would like to try to draw it to a conclusion because I did want to try to give Hon Stephen Dawson some questions before the end of it.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Some more questions. I do not appreciate this interruption because it does break my train of thought.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: This is a farce. I am not sitting here listening to him crap on.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: That is fine; you can go. You have time to ask questions but if you do not want to take up that time, you can go. May the record show that Hon Stephen Dawson is not interested in asking the questions.

Really, when you look at this, it is about \$500 000 per person per year. I accept exactly what you are saying—that the community has an expectation. These people deserve appropriate care. Are you able to highlight any particular things? You said specifically that there are things that we were not

doing in the past that we are dealing with now to deal with these very complex cases. Are you able to give us an example of the sort of things that we might be doing now that perhaps we were not doing in the past?

Ms White: There is a requirement for young people to be supervised around their behaviours. We are seeing really complex trauma, so young people who do not quite have a diagnosis of mental health, they do not quite have a disability but their behaviours and support needs generally as a result of trauma and chronic neglect and abuse, particularly in early years, requires almost the same level of intensive therapeutic support but in alternative ways. We need to spend a lot more money and time training staff and carers to be able to meet the care needs of young people. Clinical supervision of carers and staff to again have that oversight. I think mostly it is the degree in which this is happening and it is persistent. It is not something you do once or do for a month; it is required on an ongoing basis. We have a lot of multidisciplinary input that requires coordination, accountability and so on and so forth.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: That opens up a whole area of questioning that I will not start up today but perhaps I might follow it up outside of this forum through a briefing. Thank you for the opportunity to ask a couple of questions.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Minister, I refer to page 425. It is the same service that the member was just talking about, service 9. My question relates to the average cost per day of a foster care arrangement—\$125. I have looked at the recent announcement about the \$5.5 million for increases in foster care subsidies and case support. Could you start by explaining to us what portion of that \$5.5 million will increase foster care subsidies?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I can see the line around the foster care arrangement. What is the other line that you were looking for?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The average cost per day on a foster care arrangement —

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is \$125.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It is \$123 and then \$125 next financial year. I refer to the recent announcement of \$5.5 million for increases in foster care subsidies. Is a component of that \$125 being paid by that increase in funding?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is both the increase in the number of foster carers required as well as the increase in the actual cost.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What portion of the extra \$5.5 million goes to increased foster care subsidies?

Hon HELEN MORTON: So the increase from \$123 to \$125.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is that what it is?

Hon HELEN MORTON: That is what is listed there. The estimated actual for 2014–15 is \$123.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Am I right that you announced a \$5.5 million increase in foster care subsidies and case support?

Hon HELEN MORTON: There is CPI involvement as well and there is \$3.5 million in the increased foster carer subsidy.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What portion of the \$5.5 million increases foster care subsidies?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is \$3.5 million.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Does the rest go on case support?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is demand, special case support and case support.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What does that mean?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will let the director general talk about that.

Ms White: Very briefly, special case support is for exceptional and additional items that some young people require from time to time—for example, needing to make substantial changes to vehicles if a young person has disabilities, so they can have wheelchair access and so on and so forth. We keep that as a separate specialist case support because we do not need to reflect that across the 4 500 young people in care because, as the name suggests, it is for additional and special items, but we recognise every year we have great demand for that.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: How many additional children are you expecting to come into foster care in 2015–16?

[6.00 pm]

Ms White: If we take 2013–14, there were an additional 192 children enter care, and in 2014–15 there were 265 additional children and young people who entered care. Of course, there are some who enter care and some who exit care, but on average, yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So what is the proportion that enter and leave?

Hon HELEN MORTON: What was the proportion?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes. If 200 enter, how many leave? Shall I ask it in another way? What is the net increase?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The net increase is what we gave you. That is the net increase in numbers, but you are asking what the percentage increase is.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Okay; so that is the net increase.

Hon HELEN MORTON: That is the net increase. The number is the net increase.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I guess what is worrying us is that on your figures in the budget, with a \$125 average cost per day of a foster care arrangement, \$5.5 million equals only 44 000 days, which is 120 children. In other words, your increase of \$5.5 million does not go anywhere near the cost of covering the net increase per year, does it?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The numbers that I gave you are not all children going into foster care.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: They are all children who are in foster care.

Hon HELEN MORTON: They are all children in care, but they are not all going into foster care arrangements.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So you have given me the additional children expected to come into care. What about into foster care?

Hon HELEN MORTON: What you really want is the number of children going into foster care.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes.

Hon HELEN MORTON: We do not have that number.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can you guess?

Ms White: Could I add the comment that approximately 10 per cent, as an example, of all children in care at any one time are in residential care, including family group homes, so you could take that proportion off. But we would have to take the detail on notice to get you the accurate figures. They do not have a subsidy, so to speak.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes; so could you take that on notice, then?

[*Supplementary Information No C8.*]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I just wanted to ask whether the minister could provide the number of additional full-time foster care child placements that the \$5.5 million of funding will support in 2015–16.

Ms White: I think it would be useful to take that question on notice, because I think there are two parts of that question.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: All right; it is two parts to the same question.

The CHAIR: I will make that all part of C8.

With that, the committee will forward any additional questions it has to you in writing in the next couple of days through the minister, together with the transcript of evidence, which includes the questions you have taken on notice. Responses to these questions will be requested within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. Should you be unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. If members have any unasked questions, I ask them to submit these to the committee clerk at the close of the hearing. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today.

Hearing concluded at 6.04 pm
