

Division 64: Local Government and Communities, \$132 562 000 —

Ms W.M. Duncan, Chairman.

Mr A.J. Simpson, Minister for Local Government.

Ms J. Mathews, Acting Director General.

Ms E. Delany, Acting Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Ms M.R. Osman, Acting Executive Director, Strategic Development.

Mr B. Jolly, Acting Executive Director, Governance and Legislation.

Ms D. Clements, Acting Executive Director, Programs and Service Delivery.

Mr C. Johnson, Director, Financial Services.

Ms M. Dawkins, Acting Executive Director, Office of Multicultural Interests.

Mr L. Nagy, Manager, Financial Management.

The CHAIRMAN: I ask the minister to introduce his advisers to the committee.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard staff. The daily proof *Hansard* will be published at 9.00 am tomorrow.

It is the intention of the Chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. It will greatly assist Hansard if members can give these details in preface to their question.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the committee clerk by Friday, 30 August 2013. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice with the Clerk's office.

I call the member for Girrawheen.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the ninth dot point on page 778 of budget paper No 2, concerning grandparents undertaking primary care responsibilities for their grandchildren. I said page 778, did I not? It is the eighth dot point—has the minister got that?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: There is a reference to a pilot scheme. I would like the minister to expand on that scheme.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is estimated that there are about 3 000 grandcarers caring for over 4 000 grandchildren. The government supports grandcarers in a number of ways, including recurrent funding through Wanslea and its grandcarers program. In 2011–12 we produced some grandfamilies resources guidelines and additional grant funding has also been provided.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Can the minister slow down a bit because I am having trouble hearing him?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: My apologies. The support for grandcarers is a program that we run through Wanslea. As I said, there are about 3 000 grandcarers out there looking after more than 4 000 grandchildren. About 500 grandfamilies are supported with foster carer funding through the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, but 2 500 grandcarers are not recipients of those payments and will be eligible for a scheme prepared and underway, which will be the grandcarers support payment scheme. We are currently going through a process, as an election commitment, to fund a program for grandcarers and we are working with the agencies right now to work out some guidelines and a framework for how we can support grandcarers in our community who are full-time carers for their grandchildren.

As members can imagine, grandparents becoming full-time carers for their grandchildren is quite a big issue in our community and we are currently setting up guidelines and a framework for how we will support them. We are working with the non-profit sector and through Wanslea and a few other agencies to come up with some guidelines. How those grandparents are supported in looking after their grandchildren is determined by how many nights the children are cared for under their grandparents' roof and how much support they are providing.

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

We are working out the guidelines and then we can work out the time frames. The proposal is for payments of \$400 for the first child and \$250 for each subsequent child. The program will more than likely be delivered through Wanslea.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: If we look halfway down the “Spending Changes” table on page 776, the grandcarers support scheme is mentioned. I can see that no money at all has been allocated this year; then \$146 000 in 2014–15 and \$154 000 in 2015–16.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Is that the wrong line?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Sorry, I am on the wrong line.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: There is \$225 000, then \$450 000 and \$450 000.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is that the money going to Wanslea?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We are in the process right now of working out this proposal to support grandparents to look after their grandkids that we put forward at the election —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I just wanted to know —

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We are still working through that. Wanslea does provide a service like that already so it would be a natural fit, but as we go through this process—it has not been committed to the agency yet—we are still working out the guidelines to determine who will get the money. At the moment, Wanslea is providing the services and the department and I have had some talks with Wanslea about this. We are trying to finalise the details now.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: As we can see in the table, the funding goes out to 2016–17 and yet it is described as a pilot program. I am a bit intrigued as to why it is described as a pilot program.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is a pilot program at the moment because we are putting it together. The next budget is nine months away, so hopefully by the time we get there, we will have the guidelines sorted out and have some clear direction. One of the main things with running a service like this is—I have estimated that there are 3 000-odd grandcarers who are full-time carers—that we do not have a defined figure and that is what the department is now working on to get some firm figures around the amount of money that we need as we move forward.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: A further question.

The CHAIRMAN: Last one thank you.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes, that is fine—this is the important one. I calculate that about \$1.5 million is committed to the scheme between 2013 and 2016. I gather that would be both the election commitment and the Wanslea commitment—is that correct?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will ask my acting director general to give the member —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I have just added up the figures.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Given that, minister, how is it that in the Liberal Party election commitment \$5.3 million was allocated, plus an additional \$600 000 over four years—that is close to \$6 million—there is something around \$1.5 million in the budget?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: As I said at the start, this is a program that we are putting in place to help grandcarers look after their grandchildren. At the moment I do not have any idea of the number of people who will apply for the money. We have done some preliminary work and we need to do some more work. We have allocated the money to kick this off and work out how we can best support grandcarers as they look after their grandchildren. I acknowledge that the amount in the budget paper No 2 table on page 776 is only \$1.5 million over four years, but hopefully, within the next nine months I will have some guidelines in place and I will have some idea of the numbers that have to be funded. Once it is set up, hopefully I will be able to access some more money. The initial part is, I only had —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That is in here, minister!

The CHAIRMAN: Order member!

[9.10 am]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I understand that but it is a very hard climate at the moment and we are in the process of trying to work out the guidelines and how many grandparents we can support. As the minister, I think it is very important to make sure I can support grandparents and help them with what they do in the community. I want to ensure that we can support them as we work forward on the guidelines and the uptake of how many grandparents

actually do take on the role. As we move forward into the next budget cycle I will make sure that we can keep that funding going.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: On this matter the minister is fudging the figures; this is a broken promise. I have a press article on the launch of the Liberal Party's policy on grandcarers. My question relates to the same dot point as the member for Girrawheen. The article states —

The \$5.3 million Grandparents Support Scheme will run over four years.

There is not \$5.3 million in the forward estimates—broken promise number one!

Number two, the minister promised the government —

The CHAIRMAN: Does the member for Mandurah have a question?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, I want to know where the money is, because it is not in the forward estimates. I want to know where the rest of the \$5.3 million is.

The minister's government said —

Under the program, seniors can receive \$400 a year for the first grandchild under 16 and \$250 for every other child.

There is no mention that this is a pilot program. The minister has told fibs to grandparents and led them up the garden path.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Mandurah!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: My question is: where is the remainder of the \$5.3 million when we have \$225 000 for this financial year and then \$450 000 in the out years? The minister is fudging the figures. Where is the rest of the money?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: As I said at the start, one of the things we do not know about this program is how many grandcarers there are.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is estimated at 2 500.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! Allow the minister to complete his answer.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The scheme we are setting up to run this year is actually to look at how many grandcarers there are. There has been an allocation of \$1.57 million to kick this program off. I acknowledge that we are unsure of how many grandcarers we are going to have in the program; but I will make it very clear that every grandparent and grandcarer who applies for this funding will be able to access the money. We just have to work through how we can best fund this project and how to take it to the next level. At the moment I do not know how great the uptake will be; I have no idea of the final numbers but we can put more money into the program once it is set up and running.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: How did the minister arrive at the \$5.3 million? The Liberal Party must have done some analysis. The former Minister for Seniors, Hon Robyn McSweeney, who is quoted in this article, must have done some analysis that came up with the \$5.3 million. Now the minister is telling us he does not know how many people it will affect so he cannot actually commit any of the money. The minister made a promise that grandparents looking after their grandchildren will be receiving extra cash and now he is renegeing on it.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: They will.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister is renegeing on it because he has not included the \$5.3 million in the budget. How did the government arrive at the \$5.3 million in its election promise?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Every program set up under the budget —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, how did the government arrive at the \$5.3 million?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Quite often a budget will be set up that does not actually have enough money, more needs to be allocated. It can go the other way as well.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: So the minister cut it out.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We were trying to work out how much we need, and I make it clear that all grandcarers who require access to these funds will receive these funds.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister cut this?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No. We were working on a very tight budget.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: So the minister is not delivering on the \$5.3 million.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We are delivering grandcarers' payments to grandparents.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is the minister delivering on his \$5.3 million?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We are delivering grandcarers' payments to grandparents.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is the minister delivering on his \$5.3 million commitment?

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Mandurah, there is no point repeating the question the minister has answered how he wishes to.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: But my question is specific.

The CHAIRMAN: I know, but the minister can answer how he wishes. The member has asked the question several times and the minister has answered the same. I think we should move on.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I think the Chair is protecting him, quite frankly, because he is not answering the question.

The CHAIRMAN: No. There is no point asking the same question over and over if the minister is giving the same answer over and over; that wastes everyone's time. The member for Mirrabooka.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I refer to the first dot point on page 778, listed under the heading "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency", where it states —

Local governments in Western Australia play a key role ... In 2013–14 \$2 million has been provided as an initial allocation to support metropolitan local governments in planning for the implementation of reforms.

The minister and the Premier have mentioned they will bring into Parliament amendments to the Dadour provisions, which will affect local communities' capacity to have a say on the government's proposals. As the minister knows, many local communities are very disheartened and disagree with the current proposals. When does the minister intend to introduce these amendments into Parliament and will he do any consultation with the community before he does so?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: On 30 July the Premier and I announced local government reform in the metropolitan area in response to the Robson report. At the time of the launch we identified some changes to the Local Government Act 1995. The changes refer to some of the payments to CEOs, the Dadour provisions, the poll provision and adjustments to the standards panel. These are currently being worked up now and will come into Parliament in the next sitting.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: In the next sitting? So they will be introduced and read a first time in the Parliament in two weeks?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Probably two or three weeks' time; it will be in September anyway.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I must admit to having some withdrawal symptoms sitting over here on the other side acknowledging some of the people I have known before and some of the excellent work they do. I refer to page 776. I am very interested in getting an update on the item at line 25, "Royalties for Regions – Regional Collaborative Groups". As the minister knows, a lot of opportunities for collaborative groups have been identified through the local government reform process and I would like an update please.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for the question. The regional collaborative groups have done a fantastic job and this is a great tribute to the former minister who set the project up.

There are 138 local governments in Western Australia and \$1.9 million is allocated over two years to implement shared services across the group and the local governments in general. This has been a fantastic project and half of the local governments have come back to us with great ideas on how they can share resources. We have also looked at local government financial sustainability through the strategic planning process. This has been a very good learning tool for the local governments to get an across-the-board line of their assets—the assets they have now, the maintenance of those assets and replacing them in years to come. Local governments tend to look at a budget year by year; they tend to pass budgets without lifting their eyes up, if I could use an analogy, to look at the bigger picture of where the council sits in terms of its financial status and its current assets—how they manage and replace them. Importantly this process has got local councils working with their neighbours to get collaborative groups together to do resource sharing, contract buying and a number of other issues that can save resources, time and money.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

I had a great opportunity in the winter break to go out to and meet with 16 local governments in the wheatbelt. All of them had set up some sort of collaborative group to share resources, contracts and to move forward towards sharing costs across the reform process in the regions. It has worked out very well. Other government policies to support local governments, the country local government fund and royalties for regions, allow them to actually look at regional projects suited to specific areas. These small communities all migrate to one regional centre, and by focusing on those regional centres they can be supported to do that. All in all, the project has worked well. More than half of the 138 local governments have come to the table and done some sort of reform agenda. The program is working very well.

[9.20 am]

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Is the minister seeing more integration with those members of the regional collaborative groups in terms of their strategic planning and asset management planning?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: They are definitely talking to each other a lot more about strategic planning in particular to find the best way forward as a group to access more grants because they have more power as a group. They will sit down and look at strategic plans. We tend to focus a little too much on the front yard, which is great to do, and not look at the bigger picture. They need to sit in the mix of the regions. The regional centre is working very well.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer the minister to the spending changes on page 776 and the rather opaque description of program rationalisation. What does that involve in the minister's portfolios?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: In June 2013 we approved a range of savings. Many of these were reflected in the state's financial position at the time to move forward in the 2013–14 budget papers. Specified savings measures were applied to the department. The grants awarded under the social innovation grant program will be reduced and eventually wound down as we move forward. That was funded at \$3.4 million.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: When the minister says, "wound down", does he mean stopped in 2013?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes. Those grants were not fully taken up so the program was never fully utilised when it came to the grants that were given out. The idea of the social innovation grants was to kick off some ideas around social innovation in the community. It is time to move on. There were some great programs. There has also been a reduction in FTEs for program development, provision of information and planning coordination. This equates to a reduction in salaries of about \$2.5 million per annum. The combination of these savings to the department will amount to approximately \$5.9 million from 2014–15 onwards.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: In some of the other portfolios, included in that program rationalisation is either abolition of or scaling down of award ceremonies. There are a lot of these in the minister's portfolio. Are any of those affected?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Not at the moment. We are happy to stay with the award ceremonies we have. The great thing about bringing the Department for Communities and the Department of Local Government together is that it has given us the opportunity to look at all the stuff we do, especially in the Department for Communities, which has been working on some fantastic programs. We have not addressed them for quite a while. I think our communities have moved on a bit in the past 10 to 15 years. We have a huge problem with the effect of fly in, fly out workers on families and the impact on our community. Our department does not seem to have addressed much to do with family support around FIFO families. It is quite a large demographic in our community. We will look at some of those programs to see if we can help provide some services for those families and also try to identify where we can best deliver the services to the community.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: From the minister's answer, I gather that "program rationalisation" means chopping services or programs. Can he distinguish that from the reference two lines further down, "Reprioritisation of Existing Programs"? Does that mean deferring as opposed to axing?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: As part of the 2013–14 budget, the government committed to funding the following new programs: Cadets WA, community gardens and the seniors recreation program.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: They are listed separately under "Spending Changes". Presumably, they would not be included in the reprioritisation because they are separately referenced elsewhere.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: What is the minister taking out?

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Mirrabooka, can we just let the minister answer one question at a time?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will ask the acting director general to give the member a bit more information about the strategic planning we are doing around that.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Ms J. Mathews: The new Department of Local Government and Communities was created on 1 July 2013, with an interim structure in place. As a priority, we are proposing to carry out some pretty rigorous strategic planning and have a really good look at the government's priorities over the next 12 months and two years. We will be producing a strategic plan, and obviously that will form our structure going forward. That will give the department an opportunity to have a very good look at the key priorities of government—the key goals—and the key strategies to achieve those goals. All this will be in the mix in achieving those goals. We will then look at how we fund and meet those government commitments.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Implicit in the term “reprioritisation” is that some things are going to be given higher priority and some things are going to be given lower priority. Can the minister outline how the priorities have changed?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The most important priority would be delivering services to our community. As we work through those, we will determine the best priorities. From my perspective as the Minister for Communities, it is important that we keep our services in our community and also keep the need for priorities high.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I have a further question about the social innovation grants and the fact that they will cease. They have been reduced to \$3 million in 2013–14 and then they are being abolished. The government introduced the social innovation grants in about 2009 or 2010. They have not been in place for very long. They were accessed by community and not-for-profit organisations. They were introduced, and they have been in place for about four years. Did the government have any discussions with the not-for-profits and the community organisations about the take-up and assistance and think about reframing them, given that they were supposed to support community initiatives, or were they just easy low-hanging fruit that could be abolished?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for the question. The current status is that 31 projects costing \$9.4 million have been supported to date. Of these, three projects were completed in 2012–13. The remaining 28 projects have various end dates, and some are still running through to mid-2016. Three rounds were conducted in 2012–13. Thirteen new projects, costing \$3.2 million, were supported. The cost of the total grants provided in 2012–13 was \$4.4 million, including the second and third payment as previously approved in other projects. As part of these grant programs, the community sector held a conference on social innovation, which succeeded.

The main thing we are trying to do is evaluate where we are with this program. As I said at the start, the grants were not completely taken up with the money that was provided. We are undertaking a review of where to best put this money. As the member could imagine, most of the social innovation grants are still running today. As I pointed out, some are still running through to mid-2016. The department is still evaluating the program. We have identified that there may be an opportunity to re-evaluate where we put this money. More importantly, as the member could understand, with any type of grant process, we have to be conscious of what the grant is trying to achieve and that it looks into the needs of the community.

One thing we must be very cautious about, especially I as minister, is that we do not set up some sort of group, through funding a program, with wages connected to the grant process, because at the end of the grant, people might not have a job. The idea of a grant is to undertake a project on the side after undertaking a survey to develop some sort of guidelines around how we can invest the grant in services. At the moment, it is still in the mix; we still have some things to do. It is up for evaluation, and I am confident we might be able to find a better way to deliver that and move forward.

[9.30 am]

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: In the last budget under “Social Innovation Grants” ongoing funding was allocated for some time. It was launched with much hype and fanfare. Is the minister saying in this chamber that that money previously allocated to social innovations will still be grant funding; it will not go into the department's general operation revenue or not be cut to meet the minister's budget and financial parameters that the minister was given by Treasury? Will he keep that ongoing money and put it into better use if social innovation is not a good use for it? Will he continue to make sure those moneys previously allocated will go into grants for communities?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The quick answer is yes, but it depends on the evaluation we are doing of that grant at the moment. I take on board the need to make sure we keep that money. But its use will be determined by the evaluation of the grant, which is being done now, to work out the best way we can deliver.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I understand what the minister is saying about the evaluation of the program. I am saying that the minister announced with great fanfare a body of money to give to the community to build community organisations. Is the minister saying that that body of money will be available in future years so that communities can build their capacity to deliver to the Western Australian people? Will that money still be around?

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: As I said at the start, the use of the money will be determined by an evaluation.

Ms E. EVANGEL: I note the increase in funding for Children and Family Services under item 1 on page 779. Can the minister advise what additional funding is for early childhood education?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, member. This is a great program that we are running at the moment with Children and Family Services. It is being implemented through royalties for regions, and the regional community childhood development initiative is costing around \$1.2 million this year. The changes are due to the national early childhood education care reform agenda, which is a national reform happening around child care and early childhood education. It has put a fair amount of cost back on us, so we acknowledge that we are trying to raise the profile of early childhood, especially in child care. We are also making more money available to support some of the non-profit organisations. As the member can imagine, a lot of non-profit organisations run childcare centres in our community and do not have access to money to make sure they comply with the new national early childhood education framework reform. We will also provide \$50 million for children and family support services in future years. It also, importantly, recognises and improves the learning pathways, resulting in better education outcomes. A huge amount of work is being done within the childcare and family services sector, especially around early childhood and the national framework. The work Western Australia has done is well above that of the other states, so it has been very good in bringing us a long way up the bar, if I can use that analogy. Western Australian childcare centres are run very well and our department has set up a good framework. Once the national framework kicks in, we will, hopefully, take that to the next level.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Was the minister talking about the delivery of child care and family day care centres or about the regulation of childcare centres?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The regulations.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I have to say that the minister has such a deep gravelly voice —

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I apologise; I am getting over a cold.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes. Sometimes when he is talking, I do not know what he is talking about.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I apologise.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the first dot point on page 778, the local government reform issue and \$2 million allocation. I note the \$2 million allocation appears on the table on page 776.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Mandurah, can you please speak up for Hansard's benefit, thank you?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have never been told to do that before. My goodness; well, there we are! Wow!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Madam Chairman, you are treading on dangerous ground there!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In the budget papers \$2 million is allocated to the reform process. How did the minister arrive at the figure of \$2 million to progress the forced amalgamation process and what analysis was done to arrive at this amount?

The CHAIRMAN: Sorry, member for Mandurah, can you restate which particular part of the budget you are referring to?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It appears twice: the first dot point on page 778, the allocation of \$2 million—an initial allocation to support metropolitan local government—and it appears, obviously, in the table of spending changes halfway down.

The CHAIRMAN: That is sufficient; thank you, member for Mandurah.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The \$2 million allocated in this budget is to kick off the reform process we launched on 30 July this year. The idea behind this is to acknowledge that there will be a cost to local governments in starting the implementation committee, so we have offered them some money to start that process. The implementation committee is made up of the councils that will be coming together, so they can access this money once their submission has been given to the Local Government Advisory Board by 4 October. The money will be allocated then to set up the implementation committee so they can start working on how they can move forward on the issues they have within their local councils.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: How did the minister come to the \$2 million?

The CHAIRMAN: Is that a further question?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is the same question.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We did some analysis of the situations in other states and within the department and worked out a model that allowed a fair amount of money to help them get some consulting and do some preliminary work around budgeting and whatever work they need to do to get to that next level. The figure came from the department and was based on a review of how they can best start that process.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is that the big bucket the minister was talking about?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No; if the member looks at the reform agenda on the Department of Local and Government and Communities web page, he will see the presentation I made to the 30 mayors, presidents and CEOs on 30 July. It explains the implementation committee and that the process to get to the next level will take until 1 July 2015—nearly two years. They will come back to me and tell me that they have identified the cost. The government will pay the transition cost of the reform process. That is pretty much clear, but we need to work out how much that will be. In this process of reform, nine new identified councils will be born, and other councils will be affected by the changes. Eleven councils will access the money, but through the implementation committee they will identify the costs and come back to me and, hopefully, we can sit down and talk about it. When we refer to a bucket of money, it is important to remember that not one amount of money will fix all. In some cases two local governments will merge; in one case, there will be three; and in one, there will be seven. There will be a difference in the cost of record keeping between three, seven or two councils together. I acknowledge there is a cost involved. The implementation committee will work out what is a fair cost of the reform process, and I will take that back to cabinet to take it to the next level of the reform process and pay for the transition costs.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: On that same dot point, the forced amalgamation program is, I understand, based upon the first dot point on page 779. The assumption there is that the minister wants to see improvement in local government performance, and that is one of the bases for his amalgamation program. What evidence, both research and other, has the minister used to support his amalgamation program, which I say is a forced amalgamation program, in the metropolitan area?

[9.40 am]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Can the member clarify his question?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister has embarked on a process to collapse 30 councils into 14. On what analysis and research does the minister base the premise that bigger is better?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I do not think the term “bigger is better” is what we are trying to achieve. What we are trying to achieve is making councils more sustainable. It is interesting that councils in the metropolitan area, especially the outer metropolitan growth councils, are really struggling to maintain their assets, let alone deliver more assets for their communities, because of the sheer growth they are experiencing. The state is under a lot of pressure; our population will grow by another half a million people in the next 10 years. This is about giving the economies of scale back to the councils so that they can deliver better services. A number of reports on this have been done since 1994. One mayor told me he was on a committee to look at reform. There have been a number of reports over the years, such as the systemic sustainability study report and other sustainability reports. We have also looked at some financial modelling. From my perspective as Minister for Local Government, the most important thing is to ensure that all local governments are sustainable into the future and can deliver the best services for their communities. If we stay the same as we are now, with local governments varying in size and population and each council reading a planning policy differently from the next council so there is no clear direction from any of them, it will certainly get to the point at which we will need to get them to come to the table and start dealing with the bigger issues around local government and how they can best deliver services to the community. If the member were to look at any of the councils in the northern suburbs that already have more than 100 000 people, he would see the number of services they provide to their community, such as childcare services, a seniors bus and sporting facilities. That shows that the economies of scale can work well to deliver better services for ratepayers.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Which makes them bigger.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is interesting that Joondalup has an 87 per cent satisfaction rating out of 160 000 people and Peppermint Grove has 81 per cent with 1 067 people. We have to wonder about the services being delivered in each of those local government areas.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have a final question on this.

The CHAIRMAN: Final question, thank you.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Given that the focus is on sustainability, is the minister prepared to name the councils in the metropolitan area that he considers to be unsustainable at this point?

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I did not say that any were unsustainable; I said it is my job to make sure that they are sustainable into the future. The reality —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Are there any that are unsustainable? The minister just highlighted one in the western suburbs.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No, the most important thing is that they are sustainable in the future as the city grows. Local government boundaries have not changed in over 100 years. The member's and my electorate boundaries have moved at every election cycle since we have been members of Parliament, yet local government boundaries have not moved at all. Are they looking at the better deal for their ratepayers? It is important to make sure that councils are sustainable in the future because the average rate increase last year was seven per cent across the board.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is Serpentine–Jarrahdale sustainable?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The interesting —

The CHAIRMAN: I think you said that that was your last further question, member for Mandurah.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Serpentine–Jarrahdale is under a lot of pressure.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The fourth dot point on page 778 states —

Western Australia is experiencing sustained population growth, along with significant demographic and social change.

It goes on to talk about the impact of the ageing of the baby boomer cohort. I refer in particular to the long-awaited framework for seniors, which was released by the minister's predecessor in December last year. Where is the implementation of that framework? Is there any financial provision for the implementation of that framework in this year's budget; and, if not, why not?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The funding includes provision of \$225 000 for an older persons' rights service. In 2012–13, there is \$211 000 for the grandcarer service and there is also Seniors Week grants of \$45 000. Within the seniors portfolio, 330 000 WA Seniors Cards are out there and of that, 288 000 cardholders applied for a cost-of-living rebate. What is interesting in our demographics is that this year will be the first year that will have more people turn 60 than babies born. That is not only an interesting figure as we move forward, but also an opportunity for us as the seniors in our community come into retirement a lot sooner. As we support seniors in this state, we need to acknowledge the fact that they are living longer because of their better lifestyle and a lot more health services being available than, say, more than 20 years ago. As a government we are very committed to our seniors and supporting them in their retirement. I think we can all acknowledge that some of that support is delivered by the seniors rebates available through the Seniors Card, discounts on rates for seniors, free public transport and connecting through to a number of programs that are run to help seniors. We acknowledge that growth is one of the areas that will be of great concern in our seniors portfolio; as we move forward, we have to find the best way to deliver services to seniors to make sure we keep them involved in our community, which is very important. We want to keep our seniors involved moving forward. Yesterday, I met with the Seniors Recreation Council of WA about its Have a Go Day on 13 November. It is coming along really well and people shared some interesting facts about it with me. When the Seniors Recreation Council started Have a Go Day in 1994, fewer than 20 people put up a display; this year more than 200 people will have a display.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I am actually talking about implementing broad and whole-of-government policies. I think Ms Dawkins is passing the minister a note. I am talking about very important whole-of-government policy decisions based on these demographic changes. From what I can see, the framework is just another document that will not be followed up or backed up; the government is not going to put its money where its mouth is.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The document that we launched is being used across all the government agencies as we move forward. As I said, the demographic of seniors is going to grow very strongly, so we are making sure that we have age-friendly communities. All sorts of agencies, such as the Department of Planning and the Department of Transport, are looking into that as we create policies; they are all trying to work through it. In my own agency, the seniors advisory group is working hard to ensure that we implement age-friendly communities. But most importantly, the framework that has been set up is actually being utilised by all the agencies to make sure we can accommodate the growth in the number of seniors.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister mentioned \$225 000 for the older persons' rights service. I gather that that relates to elder abuse —

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes.

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Does that include a hotline?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Basically, through the elder abuse awareness strategy, the government provides a range of services to address elder abuse. In 2013–14, an increase in funding has been provided to the Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre for the Older People’s Rights Service, so we have done some work around that area. Also, one-off funding has been provided to a range of community awareness projects, including the printing of some awareness brochures and development of a community awareness strategy about how we can best support seniors. The elder abuse awareness strategy will also go further in years to come in trying to make sure that we identify that our seniors are safe in not only their community but also their own houses.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: It is estimated that one in five seniors experience elder abuse. Is there any consideration to having a hotline? I understand that the minister has had representations about that.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: One of the main things we have done since bringing the Department for Communities and the Department of Local Government together is to look at community safety. We have a great volunteer section at the department for seniors. People can ring the hotline for anything to do with Seniors Cards, such as finding out whether they can access some grants or discounts, and, more to the point, how to access public transport. We are still working through that and I think we have identified that something may have to be looked at as we move forward. The member raised some interesting figures. That one in five seniors will have some sort of abuse is a concern for me as Minister for Seniors and Volunteering. How can we best protect them in our community? The most interesting thing for us, though, is that a lot of abuse is internal within their family; that is where a lot of it comes from. A hard issue to address in the wider community is giving them the opportunity to speak up about the abuse in their family. But I take on board the member’s point and I think it is something that we could probably work on.

[9.50 am]

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: I refer to the twenty-sixth line item “Salaries and Allowances Tribunal Determination” on page 776 of the budget papers. As a former councillor and mayor, I note with interest the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal determination on elected member allowances. Can the minister please provide further information on how this is structured and what the conditions are?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for the question. It is great to see that councils have moved over to the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal for the determination of pay of presidents, mayors and councillors. The system is very similar to the one proposed by the former minister for putting some framework around the pay of CEOs and putting it into bands. Putting the determination of pay of presidents, mayors and councillors in the hands of the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal is a good opportunity to work through the four bands. The pay of councillors will depend on the band the council fits into. The member acknowledged the poor pay she received as a councillor. It is a bit interesting to note that if she were still a member of the council she would now be paid reasonably more money—but that is always the way! I think it is important to acknowledge the great work that councillors do in our community. They are the people who meet the community face-to-face on a daily basis and put in their time in dealing with the concerns of council. From my time as a councillor, I can say that if they are out four nights out of five and not at home, they are doing well because there is a lot of community work and a lot of night work. I think it is important that the government acknowledges that and that councillors be fairly reimbursed for the hard work they do. It is a great thing that the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal will now determine not only the sitting fees of elected members but also any sort of remuneration for councillors. It is a good initiative from government, and I acknowledge the former minister who started off that process.

The only point I would make about a Salaries and Allowances Tribunal determination is that I hope—as the former minister hoped—to connect it to some training, as one of the things councillors need is training. When we put councillors on what we call a six-month holiday, for whatever reasons when some decisions are made, the clear thing that comes back in a report is the lack of training for councillors who have made some decisions not based on the right analysis. The interesting part is to really push for councillors to be given the right training and to get them to think more like a company board of directors when they are making decisions. I always use the line that they put their nose in and fingers out, because when they start to put their fingers over an item, it tends to go pear shaped, so it is important for them to have training. I acknowledge that the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal will determine the pay of councillors, but we need to make sure we can get them to that next level and get enrolled —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Encouraging them to put their snouts in the trough!

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No, they look at something; they do not put their fingers on it though. Once councillors start changing motions and moving them, when we read the reports we can see that they get more and more into trouble. So it is something that is very concerning.

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: The minister has explained bands 1 to 4. What is the salary for those bands and has there been a roll-in of all the conditions such as the computer allowance et cetera?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The interesting part is that one of the issues the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal raised with the councillors was the number of honey pots, as we call them, they were accessing. Some were for grooming, some were for information technology and some were to do with allowances for cars and vehicles. Each council had its own little device for setting up an area for getting access to some sort of money for the costs of something they had implemented in the process of doing their job as a councillor.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! It is difficult to hear.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The idea of moving to the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal, which is one of the recommendations, is to look at all those other allowances and to roll them into one so that it is quite clear across the board that councillors are getting an amount of money to do the job and are not getting caught out by having access to grooming allowances, IT accounts or laptops. The reason for bringing it all into one is so that there is a fair, even pay across the whole sector. The four bands is a great way for working that out within a council. I can imagine at the moment that the workload for a councillor in a very large council compared with one in a regional area would be a little different; so the four bands acknowledge that they will get paid a reasonable amount of money for the work they do. Also the workload is another good point to do with the bands and is acknowledged in the four bands.

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: I still have not got the answer to what I asked.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Welcome to our world!

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: What does band 1 pay and what does band 4 pay? It is as basic as that.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I do not have that information with me, of all the things I brought along today, but I can get it for the member. I am pretty sure it starts off at \$10 000 to \$15 000 and the highest one goes to \$60 000 in band 4.

The CHAIRMAN: Would the member like to have that as supplementary information?

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: No, I am happy with an estimate.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Hang on! I think I might have it. There is a substantial increase in the upper level of the annual allowance from \$60 000 to \$130 000 for a Lord Mayor in recognition of the significant role of that position, as it is recognised in other states. The next highest band is one of the mayoral payment increases from \$60 000 to \$85 000 in band 1; and the attendee fee for elected members is \$24 000 with a maximum is \$30 000. Previously they were \$2 400 to \$7 000. So, the first group starts from \$24 000 whereas it was a maximum of \$7 000. The document I am looking at goes on to refer to the importance of training for elected members.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Just on that band point, it would be worthwhile getting as supplementary information an update on what councils have done since that determination and what percentage have gone for the top band.

The CHAIRMAN: Can the minister define the information he will provide, please?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes. I will provide the bandwidth of the four pay scales that councils have now, and also the number of local governments in Western Australia that have taken up the increase in the new pays since they came in.

[Supplementary Information No A44.]

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I refer to line item “Employee benefits” under the income statement on page 784. I note that the allocation for employee benefits in 2011–12 was \$34 million and the number of full-time equivalent staff was 344; in 2012–13 the estimated actual is \$33 million and 326 FTEs; and in 2013–14 the estimate is \$33 million and 326 FTEs. The forward estimates then dip down quite substantially to \$30 million, \$31 million and \$32 million. In budget paper No 3, wages growth is forecast to increase by 3.75 per cent in 2013–14, which means there must be a substantive decrease in the number of employees.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Can the minister tell me the number of cuts to FTEs this equates to and which sections of the department they will come from?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: “Employee benefits” on page 784 refers to the budgeted estimate of \$33.679 million in 2013–14 going to \$30.305 million in 2014–15. Is the issue the drop in value of money translating into the number of staff employed?

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I want to know what the FTEs will be to deliver on the forward estimates over 2014–15, 2015–16 and 2016–17. I have done some rough calculations while I have been sitting here, so I have an idea of what they will be, but I want to know what the minister thinks they will be.

[10.00 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, before you start, could you do what the member for Mirrabooka just did and turn up the volume knob.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Turn it right up high.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Is the sound not coming out?

The CHAIRMAN: That made the member for Mirrabooka louder, so let us see whether this makes the minister louder.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Put it up as high as it will go.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Apologies. I will break it off in a minute! I will ask my director general to answer the details on the FTE positions.

Ms J. Mathews: The member is correct in noting that there has been a drop in FTE positions from 344 in 2011–12—these are in the notes—to 326 in 2013–14. That is reflected in the current interim structure that we have with the new department. In going forward, the projected drop relates to that program rationalisation of the \$2.5 million that the department is expected to absorb from 2013–14 to 2014–15, but that will be looked at in the context of the strategic planning that we will undertake to ensure that the right structures and resources are in place to achieve the government's priorities. At the end of the day, as part of that exercise we will look at the government's goals for the new department and the specific strategies to achieve those. In turn, that will inform the final structure of the department. At the moment it is an interim structure. Bear in mind that essentially two departments have been joined together as at 1 July. Over the next few months there will be an opportunity to have a good look at the required structure and FTE resources to deliver on the government's priorities, which are about delivering outcomes to communities.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Given that that did not answer the question whatsoever, it makes the director general a very good director by being able to give us the blurb. I have worked out that even if it does not add 3.75 per cent in 2013–14, unless the department guts its services, it will lose 33 FTE positions. The department will go under the 300 mark. Can the minister tell me—yes or no—whether the department is targeting 33-odd if it is to deliver a reduction from \$33 million down to \$30 million, given that I have not added the 3.75 per cent? Without even factoring that in, the department is sitting at around 293 FTEs. Will the department substantially reduce the number of FTEs; and, if so, by how much and where?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: In the past six weeks we have brought together the Department for Communities and the Department of Local Government. There are strategies around not only how we best deliver services, but also the number of staff needed as we move forward and a new identity is born. We are only six weeks into the job and we have had to quickly put together a budget. We are still trying to work on the issues that have resulted from the two agencies coming together. As I said this morning, we will be back here in nine months with the next budget. Hopefully, I will then have clearer figures on the number of FTE positions and how I can best fund and resource the department to deliver those services.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The minister put together this budget. He is the person who took it to cabinet. He will take a massive cut in the number of his employees. Because the Office of Shared Services has been decommissioned, the department will need human resources people whom it has not employed before. In a department of 326 people, another two or three people will need to be employed to deliver the department's HR management. How will the minister deliver that very substantial cut from \$33 million down to \$30 million in employee benefits without substantially cutting the number of FTEs? If the minister does not know that now, that is a real concern. That must be extraordinarily disruptive for the department's employees.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: One of the main things is that the Department for Communities delivers a lot of services. Some are finite while others are continuing. For instance, at the moment we are winding up the country high school hostels ex gratia scheme through which we have paid out money to people affected by abuse at the Katanning hostel. Some people in FTE positions have been running that program and prior to that they were running the Redress WA scheme. As that is finalised, staff will become available to move into other areas in the Department for Communities. There are areas such as that in the department that are constantly under review or are finite in nature because they deliver a service or a program that is not ongoing. We can then reallocate those positions around the department. Keep in mind that we still have to work through it. The member has identified a very good point and it is something that I will watch. It has been only six weeks since we brought the two

departments together and I still have not had the opportunity to meet with everyone. I acknowledge the issue and I will address it as it comes up.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Has the minister identified anyone in the department who will be forced into redundancy at this stage?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Not at this stage.

[Mr I.M. Britza took the chair.]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is the minister able to advise how much the creation of the new department has cost through changing the letterhead, rebadging and all the various other administrative costs?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We have been very frugal. We have wound down our current stationery. Even when I became the new minister in March, I made sure that no documents that had the former minister's name were pushed aside. I left everything in place. As they come up for renewal, we will change that. We have kept everything, such as brochures and letterheads, as the Department for Communities. I made it very, very clear that I did not want everything changed just because I am the new minister; we left everything in place and as they come up for renewal, we will change the name. Keep in mind that the changes to the names of the departments will also affect that process. We have been very conscious not to incur any extra costs. The majority of the costs that we have incurred from merging the two departments have come out of the current printing budgets of the departments.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What was the cost, frugal though it may have been?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: There is no specific cost at this stage because we are only six weeks into the job. It is something the member could ask me a few months down the road once we have sorted it out. We have been utilising each department's assets.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Can the minister advise how many people have a sole responsibility in the area of seniors? How many members in the department work exclusively on seniors' issues?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I may have to take that as a supplementary question. In my head I can walk in there and I know where Troy sits and I know where Liz sits. When I walk through the department, I know where they sit. I know who is who. I am just trying to count in my head. Without counting the volunteer section over on the right there, there would be quite a large number of people who work on seniors' issues. I will ask Margaret to give the member those figures.

The CHAIRMAN: Will supplementary information be provided or do you have the answer?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will ask the adviser to give the member the information.

Ms M. Dawkins: The number of people working on seniors is split across the funding area, the policy and programs area, the Seniors Card centre, seniors information service and in our communications during Seniors Week and the like. They are not all sitting perhaps in one structural entity. They are in different divisions in the department. We can indicate that in the policy and programs area there are six FTE positions.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Are they not exclusively working on seniors' issues?

Ms M. Dawkins: No.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Someone might work 10 per cent on seniors, so cumulatively, how many people work on seniors?

Ms M. Dawkins: I am adding the partial FTEs. Someone might work some of the time on volunteering and some of the time on seniors. We have gone through an exercise to work out what proportion of their time is in, say, the area of seniors' policy and programs.

[10.10 am]

Does the member want only people who work in the seniors area 100 per cent of the time?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I want to know how many people are dedicated to seniors this year.

Ms M. Dawkins: I think the answer is the proportion of full-time equivalents added up then.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is the acting executive director saying six?

Ms M. Dawkins: No; I am continuing. In the policy and programs area there are six FTEs and in the general administration of the Seniors Card there are 4.75 FTEs. The cost-of-living assistance payment is a payment scheme, as the member knows.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: How many FTEs does that have?

Ms M. Dawkins: It has 3.87 FTEs. On top of that, we have proportions of people doing Seniors Week. I do not have the figures on those, but they would be about one FTE across the course of the year doing Seniors Week and seniors' publications. We also have a proportion of supporting people doing human resources and finance in the director general's media liaison unit.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: My understanding is that there are two full-time equivalents working on women's policy. Is that the case? How many people are working on women's policy? Just give it to me straight. Do not divvy up stuff for me; I worked in women's policy. How many people are sitting at those desks working on women's policy?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I might have to take that question as a supplementary question, as it is not my portfolio; it is that of the Minister for Police; Women's Interests.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The Minister for Local Government is answering the questions here now. The Minister for Police did not have an allocation for women's policy last night, whereas Minister Nahan has an allocation. This is the time we can ask questions about that. The government and the government Whip did not give Minister Harvey an estimates division for women's interests; otherwise, I would have asked the question last night.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will take that question as a supplementary question and get back to the member. We will give a clarified answer on the number of FTEs in the women's interests portfolio who are working on women's policy.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Not the Women's Information Service, which is one FTE.

[Supplementary Information No A45.]

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I refer to "Spending Changes" and the line item "Community gardens" one-third of the way down page 776 of the *Budget Statements*. The minister may not know that there are some very keen gardeners in the fantastic city of Bunbury.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I think the member for Bunbury is a parsnip fan; is that right?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I like a bit more of a variety of vegetables! I am talking about vegetable gardens, member for Mandurah, not anything else!

One community garden that comes to mind is Thommo's Community Garden, which is a very good organisation in Bunbury that was started by the late Colin Thompson and carried on by his brother John in his memory. The organisation works with schools and places like Foodbank. There are similar groups that would be very keen to take up the government's commitment to community gardens in the budget. I am interested to hear from the minister about the funding and the sorts of people who can apply for those grants. Could the minister please enlighten me?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The community gardens program is a great program that came up after the election this year. We have allocated money to help start community gardens and, as the member has pointed out, people who run community gardens that are already operating can apply for money for an upgrade. I think the program is very important and it is very similar to the Men's Shed program, which is also about getting people out and about in their communities and getting involved. A community garden is a great little project for the community. They also teach kids about growing fruit and vegetables. Community gardens give back to the community and go a long way to helping it. They can also encourage nice networks in the community as meeting places for people to sit around and watch vegetables grow, and to have a cup of tea and chat about them. As the member said, \$400 000 will be allocated over four years, so there is an opportunity for communities to apply for grants of up to \$20 000 to establish a community garden and another amount of \$10 000 can also be applied for. We are in the final stages of putting the framework and guidelines together to put out to communities for expressions of interest. It is important to note that gardens play a great role in our community and it is great to see that the member for Bunbury already has a community garden in his electorate that is working very well. There is opportunity for that organisation to apply for some money to expand and upgrade its facilities.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Thommo's Community Garden has a great amount of community support for the things it does and people can rent space there. I invite the minister to look at the garden and meet with the organisation the next time he is in Bunbury, and to assess the amount of funding it may require. Would the minister mind coming?

The CHAIRMAN: Is there a question in that?

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The next opportunity I have to go to Bunbury I will go there, for sure.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the list of significant issues impacting the agency on page 778 of the *Budget Statements*. The first dot point lists local government reform. I expect the minister will need to answer this question by way of supplementary information, but I would like to know the number of complaints made to the Department of Local Government in the past two years by councillors, presidents and mayors against other elected members; and, from which councils those complaints were made. I would also like to know the number of complaints that were investigated; the disciplinary action taken against an elected member; the number of complaints made to the department in the last two years by councillors, presidents and mayors against CEOs and/or other council staff; and the number of those complaints that were investigated and the disciplinary action taken against an officer or staff member. I obviously do not expect the minister to answer that question now.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member is dead right. I will run through those things with the member again so we can allocate a number for that information. I have to make a couple of points regarding the standards panel. When we come back to Parliament, I will bring in some legislation to streamline the process of it. Sometimes nasty, vexatious letters are written in the heat of the moment, but the standards panel has to deal with every complaint through the same process. I will give the panel the power to look at a complaint and make an assessment of it to determine whether it can be dismissed. Often when I visit councils I am told that the standards panel often takes too long to deal with issues in the community or the council. I take on board the fact that the member needs the numbers. I will go through what the member wants again to allocate a number for supplementary information.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I want the number of complaints made to the department in the last two years by councillors, presidents and mayors against other elected members and from which councils they came from. I also want the number of complaints that were investigated; the disciplinary action taken against an elected member; the number of complaints made to the department in the last two years by councillors, presidents and mayors against CEOs and other council staff; and the number of those complaints that were investigated and the disciplinary action taken against an officer or staff member.

The CHAIRMAN: Are there four parts to that?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: It might be appropriate to include complaints by staff against elected members.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is a good point. I also want the number of complaints by council staff against elected members and, of those investigated, information on what disciplinary action was taken.

[*Supplementary Information No A46.*]

[10.20 am]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the first dot point on page 778. Just before the announcement by the minister and the Premier on 30 July about local government reform in the metropolitan area, the Leader of the National Party claimed that a deal had been done under which the Nationals would support the minister and the Premier's forced amalgamation plan in the metropolitan area if they did not force any amalgamations in the country. Is the minister aware of any deal that has been agreed to between the Premier and/or cabinet and the Leader of the National Party?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for the question. I am not aware of any deal. The only thing I know is that cabinet made the decision that it would do the metropolitan reform process and remove the poll provision for the metropolitan area as we move forward to get that reform process off the ground. It was a cabinet decision.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: So with regard to the claim by the Leader of the National Party that a deal had been arranged between the National Party and the government, the minister does not believe that any deal was done?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am not aware of any deal.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Therefore, will the minister be embarking upon any amalgamation process in country Western Australia in this term of government?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: At the moment, member, I have my hands rather full with the metropolitan reform process.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is not the question.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: As we are moving through this process, I have already been approached by some of the councils in regional areas that wish to come on board and have been talking to me about some reform.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Can the minister tell me what those councils are?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member may remember that last year, we started off with the Shire of Narrogin, the Town of Narrogin and the Shire of Cuballing. That went to a poll on 6 April, and it was defeated. So the Shire of Narrogin and the Town of Narrogin have approached me to see how they can get to the next point so that they can come together. They have raised with me the issue of grants and how they will be able to continue to get those grants when they do come together, and what those grants will be, and we are working through that. We are looking also at how we can dovetail them into the same process as the one that takes place with the metropolitan reform, and they will probably come in at the same time. There are councils in the regions that are quite happy to have a chat to us about this process. The member may know, too, about the south east Avon group, which comprises the councils of York, Tammin, Cunderdin and Quairading. The advisory board went out there three weeks ago and met with those communities to talk about how they could come together as one. So that is happening in the regions as we speak. But with regard to any plans that we may have to go further than that, I first have to address what I have on the table at the moment and work through that.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Will the minister be offering any incentives, including money, to any country councils to assist them in their dialogue with neighbouring councils?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We have offered money to the metropolitan councils to enable them to get to the next level, which is a committee. If some of the country councils want to come together, some money will be available for that, as has been the case for all the other councils that have gone through this process. In the last five years, five councils have gone through some sort of reform process, and they have all been able to access some of that money as they have moved forward. The one thing that we have identified as a government is that a cost is involved. So they are all entitled to access some money to enable them to go through that reform process.

Ms E. EVANGEL: I refer to the eighth line item on page 776, “Cadets WA”. Can the minister comment on the growing number of cadet units in Western Australia, and on why the government has increased the funding for cadet units?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for the question. Cadets WA is a fantastic program. About 7 000 young people in Western Australia are involved in the 200 cadet units that we have around the state. I had the opportunity last Friday night to see the young people at TS Canning Australian Navy Cadets. It was fantastic to see those cadets, all in uniform and with shiny boots. They are doing a fantastic job. The most important thing about our cadet units is that they help our young people to become great adults and great citizens in our community.

The increased funding in the budget for Cadets WA will provide for the establishment of an extra six cadet units around the state. I have been trying to put some cadet programs into the north west and into the regions. There does not seem to be a great uptake of cadet programs in the north west of the state, so we are looking at entering into some sort of partnership in the north west, the Pilbara and the Kimberley, and also in the midwest, to, hopefully, get another six cadet units up and running. We are working through that at the moment with the bush rangers, police rangers, Red Cross, surf lifesaving, St John Ambulance, and the Navy, Army and Air Force cadet units.

The cadet units in this state are doing great work with our young people. The young people I saw last Friday night were really enjoying being a cadet. They gave me a tour of their facility, and it is fantastic. The reason I went out to TS Canning cadets was to present them with a Lotterywest cheque to help them with a new motor and trailer for their boat as part of the great work that they are doing in their community. Cadets WA is doing great work and I am very pleased to have the opportunity to commit more money to ensure that we can keep that great program going.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: While we are talking about cadets, is the minister able to give me an update on what is happening with St John Ambulance Cadets and whether the department has been able to ensure that that program will continue? I understand that the department funds part of St John Ambulance Cadets, but that St John has suddenly decided to cut the program without any discussion with the department.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for the question. This issue came up in about April or May this year, when St John Ambulance was looking at ceasing its cadet program and running a different program. This is an issue that has been around for a while. I had the opportunity to meet with Mr Tony Ahern, the chief executive officer of St John Ambulance Western Australia, on 4 July this year. We are currently working with St John Ambulance on this program. St John Ambulance has identified that it is committed to continuing its cadet program. It has not ceased the program. It is happy to keep it going. It acknowledges the great work that cadets are doing in our community. But it has also identified that it wants to run a trial program over the coming year to look at providing first-aid courses for seniors at high school. When I met with Mr Ahern, he was very apologetic that a decision had been made without any consultation. He acknowledged that was a mistake. Mr Ahern has

given me a commitment that he will work with my department, and also with me—we have kept in touch on the issue—and that the cadet program will keep running.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: For how long? It was until December, was it not?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That was the announcement that was made in May. We have had some good dialogue with Mr Ahern to try to work out the best type of program to put in place. Mr Ahern has received a lot of emails and letters about this cadet program, as have the member and I, and St John Ambulance has now said that it will leave the program in place for the time being. We have identified that what St John Ambulance was trying to achieve was the provision of first-aid training for seniors at high school, and we acknowledge that that is a good idea. So we are having a chat with St John Ambulance to see whether we can help it to deliver that program as well, but the current cadet program in place with St John Ambulance will stay as it is, and we are having a dialogue with St John to make sure that we can keep that program running.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: My recollection is that in the youth section of the Department for Communities, there are two workers, and at least one of those workers is working full-time on cadets. Is that the case, or are both those workers working full-time on cadets?

[10.30 am]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will get my adviser to clarify that for the member.

Ms D. Clements: There is one full-time person working on cadets but a range of people obviously provide support to cadets as required.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Are there two FTE policy officers for youth?

Ms D. Clements: I am not in a position to answer that.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I may need to take the question on notice. Does the member want to know how many in the department —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I want to know how many people work in the youth area. There is one whole FTE working on cadets. That is under youth. Given that “youth” is more than cadets, how many other policy or program people are working on youth programs? Even though the minister said that there are more people getting older than being born in Western Australia, we still have a very young population, especially because of the migrant intake. How many people in the department work in the youth area?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I ask my adviser, Margaret Dawkins, to provide a reply.

Ms M. Dawkins: I seem to be becoming the FTE go-to person. I again explain that, as with the seniors portfolio, youth is spread into different functional areas. We have heard that there is a dedicated youth officer. The department has a significant program of non-government funding in the youth area, so there are clearly a number of staff working in the youth portfolio. We have program staff. We have two officers who work part-time in country areas plus our program and policy staff. We also have the National Youth Week youth awards. They are all significant and dedicated youth activities. In total, across the whole department, there are 12.08 FTEs. That includes the one cadet FTE who was mentioned.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I have a further question. Is the minister able to provide by way of supplementary information details of the department’s youth programs and their funding?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I may have to —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I think one of the advisers behind the minister is just going to hand that information to him. The minister can provide that by way of supplementary information so that we are not wasting everyone’s time.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Sure.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you happy to do that, minister?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will take it on notice and give the member a copy of this.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: It is nice when the CEO tells the minister how to run these things. Good one, minister!

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I know. I am a new minister; I am a bit nervous. I will provide a list of youth services provided by the department in spreadsheet form to the member.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Thank you very much. Will the minister provide the spreadsheet that is currently before him as that supplementary information?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Correct.

[*Supplementary Information No A47.*]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer the minister to page 776 of the *Budget Statements* and the line item on the seniors' safety and security rebate. What was the expenditure on that last year?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Last year it was \$3.7 million.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: It was estimated at \$3.85 million, so that is pretty much on track. I note that this year only \$1 million is being provided. What is the reason for that?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We started the program back in 2009. Since then, around 46 000 seniors have received some sort of safety and security rebate payment totalling \$8.3 million. The program was due to come to completion back in 2012 and we extended it for another 12 months. As of 1 November, a new scheme will be introduced to provide payments of basically up to \$200 for personal safety items, such as the devices the people hang around their necks that have buttons that they can press if they are in danger. Also, this program will help any seniors who have been burgled; they will be able to access some security rebates. As we move forward with the security rebate scheme, we are looking at best need. The rebate reached its capacity in the last four years. Even my Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council reported to me that there has been a good take-up of this rebate, but that it has slowed in the last year because the majority of people have security for their homes. As we move forward we acknowledge that we have to restructure that program and look more at in-house needs and devices that help people at home. As I said, one of the things it will cover is personal safety devices that hang around people's necks and have a button that they can push. We also acknowledge that anyone who has had a burglary will be able to access the security fund.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I have a further question. Eighteen months or so ago the scheme was extended to also include fire safety equipment. Could the minister provide a breakdown for the last year of how much of that fund was used to access either the extinguisher, fire blanket or fire safety equipment as opposed to personal safety equipment?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I may have to take that question on notice so that I can get a breakdown of the security rebates.

The CHAIRMAN: Supplementary?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes. I will provide some information on the seniors' security rebate in terms of how many applications there were for smoke alarms, fire extinguishers and other fire safety equipment.

[*Supplementary Information No A48.*]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I have a further question. After this year there is no money allocated for that program. I got the impression that maybe in Seniors Week or around November the minister might announce another kind of scheme. Is that what the minister is intending to do?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member may have to wait until Seniors Week for that announcement. The interesting part is that we have gone through a process since 2009 of providing \$8.3 million in security rebates. The uptake of those rebates has been a lot slower as it has moved forward. It is one of those programs that has not met its lifespan but has achieved what it needed to do to make seniors feel safe at home. We are now taking it to the next level. We acknowledge that we need to get more in touch with people who are at home and to provide personal devices that they can use to protect themselves, but also if anyone has had a burglary, to enable them to access some money. We are in the process of trying to work that out. Again, it is one of those things in this portfolio where we need to recognise where the need is. I am working with my Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council to work out the best things to put money into to help seniors feel safe at home.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I have a further question; it might be the penultimate question, if that is any consolation. In this context I refer to the Liberal Party's election commitment, which was \$15 million over four years. Irrespective of whether this program will take some different guise or format, there is no money in the budget after this year. Can the minister explain how he will pay for this if it is not budgeted for? Certainly, \$1 million falls way short of \$15 million.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is one of those programs that has been in place for quite a while—since 2009. We acknowledge that it has probably reached the end of its life. We are looking at some different ways of delivering security rebates to seniors.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: For free?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We are trying to identify how we can best make them feel safe at home; hence, money has been allocated to change the format from 1 November to provide more home-based security devices and also to

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

help anyone whose home has been burgled. We are trying to work with our seniors to make sure that they feel safe in their homes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: This is my last question. That is all well and good, and I understand that, but the government promised to allocate \$15 million over four years and there is nothing in the budget. Whether the minister announces something in November or not, can he advise where that money will come from?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Member —

[10.40 am]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Frankly, this is a political commitment, so the minister's director general should not be advising him. This is a matter for the minister. He is the politician, he is paid the big bucks, and he is the one who made the promise, so he can let us know where the money is coming from.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: As I said at the start, this has been one of those programs that we started in 2009 as a Liberal government initiative. We think it has reached its fruition and we will, hopefully, still work with seniors to make sure they feel safe at home. It is probably one of those things that we need to address as we move forward. As I said at the start, the senior uptake was quite strong in the earlier years, but in the last four years the uptake has been a lot less. We are trying to put in a program that will make seniors feel safe at home and we will change the program to best suit those people at home, while making sure we keep those seniors living in their community.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I can describe this as a broken promise then can I, minister? Apparently the director general is giving the minister political advice. That is inappropriate.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the first dot point under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" on page 778 of budget paper No 2 about changes to local governments in metropolitan areas. Before the minister became minister, some of his comments about the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale and the minister not supporting super councils were published in his local paper, yet in the minister's plan that was released on 30 July, he has created a super council by amalgamating Serpentine–Jarrahdale with the City of Armadale. Can the minister explain why people would not think that this is a betrayal—particularly those living in Serpentine–Jarrahdale—and what impact this decision will have on the constitution of the Peel region?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: In regard to the comments I made last year about the Robson report that identified that the City of Gosnells, the City of Armadale and the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale would become one super council, I do not believe that Armadale and SJ is a super council. In fact, it is quite a unique fit. Until 1974, Byford was part of Armadale. It is our regional centre. There are some arguments around the second part of the member's question about what is happening in the Peel region because the SJ shire is, under an act of Parliament, in the Peel region. That will stay in place under the reform process. It is still the location of SJ. The important thing is that there is talk in the community all the time about staying in the Peel region, which I think has some merit, but I have the metropolitan reform on my table; I do not have the Peel region reform on my table to deal with.

The interesting part is that, although members of the community are quite keen to stay in the Peel region—I think there is merit in part of the shire possibly doing that—the last time I checked there is no Peel council; we would have to go down to the Shire of Murray. I spoke with Shire of Murray officials yesterday and asked whether anyone had come down to see them and have a chat to them to see whether they could possibly look at it—no one has. As part of the advisory board, they will go out and meet with SJ ratepayers. I think there will be a big push for part of it to end up in the Shire of Murray so there will be what is called a "natural connection" to the Peel region; I think there are some synergies around that. The urban cell of Byford, where all the growth is at the moment, and the next cell to come on, Mundijong–Whitby, are very strong urban cells that will bear the brunt of the 50 000 people population growth in the next 10 years. I think it is important to go back to my original statements to make sure that my councils are better sustained and financially able to deal with that growth. SJ has gone from a population of 14 000 in 2001 to nearly 22 000 in 2013; that is 12 years of strong growth. That has also had an impact on what is a small council with only 8 500 rate notices going out. I have had rate increases of 12 per cent one year and eight per cent the next for my quite moderate house in Byford, and on average I am paying \$1 900 a year in rates—some are closer to \$2 000—so they are quite expensive rates for what we are getting.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This is for the minister's 10-bedroom mansion.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: One of the interesting things that we have to look at in the reform process is to make sure that local governments can be sustainable and deliver the services that people need. I do not believe it is a super council, unlike what is outlined in the Robson report on Gosnells; I think it is a natural fit. Yes, there are some opportunities for part of SJ to head down to Murray; there is a natural fit with Keysbrook. I am not sure about

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Serpentine, and that is one of the reasons that the Robson report—the member may remember—drew a line along the Serpentine River. One of my comments in the paper was that the community was being divided; what is Serpentine–Jarrahdale without Serpentine? It does not quite make sense, so one of the reasons I made sure that I left SJ in there was to ensure Serpentine and Jarrahdale stay there. We can talk with the community about whether they still feel the need, and find the best way forward.

Keep in mind, though, under the reform process, I am dealing with metropolitan reform. The metropolitan boundary line in the metropolitan region scheme is at Keysbrook between the Shire of Murray and the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale. I am dealing with that at the moment, but if the Shire of Murray is open to the idea of having some of SJ come into it, I am happy to have a chat. I think the community could probably do some work around that if they feel it would be a natural fit. I think that with the sheer growth of the population of Byford to 35 000 in the next 10 years, Armadale will always be its regional centre, with its eventual connection to the train line and the Leach and Tonkin Highways. But it will always be its regional centre because of its attraction to that area. It does have a fit into that area—but there is still a long way to go.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This is a serious issue for the Peel region. I respect the fact that the minister is dealing with metropolitan councils, but it is intrinsically linked to Peel because of Serpentine–Jarrahdale. The minister has a timeline of 3 October —

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The fourth.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: — the fourth for the submissions. The minister said he spoke to the Murray shire yesterday. I think it is pertinent that he formally meet with the Peel Development Commission leadership, and the Shire of Murray will need to make a formal submission—I am assuming that they can still make a submission even though the Peel Development Commission is not part of the deal—because I think this is critical. Would the minister take it upon himself to meet with those two entities in particular?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am meeting with someone from the Peel Development Commission in my office on Friday, and someone from Mandurah is also coming to see me about this exact issue.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Good. I am happy and very pleased about that. Regarding Serpentine–Jarrahdale’s entity, when in time to come the minister agrees to an excision of the southern part of the Serpentine–Jarrahdale shire into the Shire of Murray, for example, and the balance of the Serpentine–Jarrahdale shire to the north going into Armadale, has he had any legal advice about the impact of any change to the act that created the development commissions—in particular the Peel Development Commission—and whether there needs to be an amendment to that act? The minister has talked about the locality issue, but the legislation specifically refers to the local government entity, and this is a change to the local entity. Has the minister had any legal advice about what might need to happen with an amendment to the act that determined the Peel Development Commission?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: At the moment we are dealing with the Department of Lands, royalties for regions and a few other agencies to try to work through that. The member raises a very good point.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Sorry; what did the minister say?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We have been dealing with some agencies about this issue; we have been talking with the Department of Regional Development, the Department of Planning and a lot of agencies about this particular issue. The local government is determined as a region under an act of Parliament, and it identifies that the boundary of the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale is in that process. We are now trying to work out how to best transition this going forward. One of the areas that we need to work on, which was identified as being an important part of Serpentine–Jarrahdale, is the Peel region. Both the member for Mandurah and I know the Peel region well. It includes the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council. A number of underlying identities that provide major services and do a lot of environmental work come under the Peel banner. We are working through that at the moment. This is one of the issues that we need to bring to the table after 4 October so we can get that money and use it to get some reports that look at the best way to proceed.

[10.50 am]

The member has already identified that the act refers to the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale. If we were to reform it into a new identity borne out of Armadale and Serpentine–Jarrahdale, what would that identity be and how would that impact on the Peel region if it is not the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale? Does it have to be changed? That is part of the process we are working on now. We are looking at the other issues. The advisory board wants to talk to the community. I have received a number of emails about this whole issue of staying in the Peel region, which is a great statement to make but I need to identify whether the whole of Serpentine–Jarrahdale stays in or part of it stays in. what happens to the Peel region as a whole is more important. We need to identify the urban sprawl of Byford, which will eventually come under the Mundijong infrastructure plan, and its natural

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

connection with the regional centre of Armadale. At the same time, it is more important that the Peel region retains its own identity and also continues to do the great work that it does through all those other agencies. It is one of those areas that need to be addressed. I am working with my department and other agencies on those issues.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In those discussions, would the minister raise the issue of amalgamation of councils within the Peel region; that is, the Shire of Murray, the City of Mandurah and the Shire of Waroona?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I have enough fights on my hand at the moment. I think there are some areas that we need to look at. The member for Mandurah has been very outspoken on this issue of the best way forward for the Peel region. We spoke earlier about Serpentine–Jarrahdale staying in the Peel region. The most important thing is that the Peel region retains its identity. The members for Mandurah and Murray–Wellington have been very good advocates for the Peel region as a whole. It is important that we look at that issue. There could be some room to move around that process, but how we get there and how we do it is an issue that we need to look at. Maybe it is something we can do after we have done the metropolitan area. I am led by the member for Mandurah. I imagine he will be a very good sounding board on this issue, along with my colleague the member for Murray–Wellington. It is an interesting time.

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: This government has acknowledged that some country boarders suffered abuse while in country hostels under the state’s control. When will compensation be paid to these people? I refer to the line item, “Country High Schools Hostels Ex Gratia Scheme” on page 776.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: As the member is probably very much aware, this issue of ex gratia payments has been around for a little while. We are in the last stages of putting that together. At the outset, I make the point that no amount of money will ever make up for what these people went through all those years ago and the abuse they suffered, especially at the Katanning hostel, which is one of the things that has been driving these payments. The grievance put to the Premier in this chamber last Thursday highlighted the impact this abuse has had on their lives and how they have dealt with it.

The government has set aside \$6 million in this budget for the country high schools hostels ex gratia payments; we are in the last stages. These payments should be sent out in the next couple of months. The first payment should be made in December this year. My staff and the department are working on this. Trying to resolve it involves quite a large full-time workload. We have been conscious to ensure that we keep the counselling hotline running, and we will keep it going. It is important to provide as much support as we can to the victims of abuse at these hostels. My department has done a lot of work trying to bring this all together and get the payments out. Departmental officers have interviewed each individual. We hope to have this wrapped up by early next year and get those payments out to people sooner rather than later. We need to acknowledge that process.

Last Saturday night I attended the Constable Care Child Safety Awards. I was pleased to see a number of initiatives relating to raising children and increasing awareness of bullying and abuse, which is one of those issues that we have to work on. WA acknowledges that we have had this abuse in our community. We now have to work out how we can stop it from happening. We are identifying ways of spending money to deal with it and increasing the awareness of bullying and abuse issues in the community, especially in state-run government hostels.

The ex gratia payment scheme is in its final stages. My department has had a big workload dealing with this on a day-to-day basis. I hope that by the end of the year those payments will be made to the people affected. As I said, no amount of money can compensate the victims who have been abused but it is one small token towards enabling them to get on with their lives.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I refer to the line item “Animal Shelters” on page 776. Last year the Minister for Local Government promised \$3.24 million over two years to local government for the Cat Act implementation grant program. I cannot see where that has been set aside in the budget papers. Has funding of that \$3.24 million been set aside for this purpose in the 2013–14 budget? If so, where will it come from and how much has been set aside for 2013–14? I have a further question, just so I do not confuse the minister too much.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member is correct; a total of \$3.24 million was made available over two years to support the local government sector and the relevant organisation to administer and enforce the Cat Act 2011. The grant agreement for the 2012–13 funding level has been completed and a total of \$345 000 is available for a second round of funding in 2013–14. I will take the member through the grants.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Where is it in the budget?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am telling the member what happened to the \$3.24 million. Pretty much all of it has been —

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Has it been spent already?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It has been allocated in grants. I will go through it for the member. Funding was allocated for the following: for the cat management facilities, 36 grants came in at \$1.995 million; a sterilisation program of 32 grants had a value of \$345 000; and miscellaneous items of 78 grants had a value of \$215 000. The \$3.24 million had pretty much all been rolled out prior to this year's budget.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: It was allocated over two years, and it was spent in a year. That is good budget management!

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The second round was announced on 16 May this year. Funding was announced to assist pensioners and low-income earners. We have 42 applications.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: How much was given in the May 2013 announcement?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I refer to page 785 of the budget papers. Under "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies" is the line item, "Financial Support to Local Government". Further down it refers to local government amalgamations and the implementation of the Cat Act 2011.

[11.00 am]

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I have "Financial Support to Local Government" and that is it. That is the minister's detail; I do not have that. I would like that detail. If the minister would like to give me that detail that would be good.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will just clarify that we have allocated \$2.6 million for 2012–13 and \$344 000 in 2013–14 for the Cat Act 2011. As I said at the start, the act was rolled out in 2012–13, so the \$2.6 million was over two years. In 2012–13 and 2013–14 the money was spent on grants to the community to help them to assist with cat management facilities, sterilisation programs and local government implementation of the Cat Act.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Of the \$3.916 million in financial support to local government in 2012–13, \$3.2 million of that was the Cat Act implementation grant program?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, \$1.9 million of it was. There were 36 grants valued at \$1.995 million for cat management facilities, and 32 grants valued at \$345 000 for the sterilisation program.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So only part of that \$3.916 million is actually the \$3.24 million?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: In 2012–13 we spent \$1.91 million on facilities, \$345 000 on sterilisation and \$215 000 on miscellaneous. That adds up to just over \$2 million. In 2013–14 there is \$345 000 available for the second round of the sterilisation program.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: But that does not add up to \$3.24 million does it?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Let me just do a quick calculation here.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I got \$2 million, and then the minister said there is another \$345 000.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes and \$215 000 for miscellaneous. That is \$560 000. There is some administration —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Administration by the Department of Local Government, so the minister gobbled up some of the \$3.24 million?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, \$390 000, which is the missing amount, in administration.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Of \$3.24 million, \$390 000 went to the Department of Local Government?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Over two years.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Of \$3.24 million, about \$400 000 went to the Department of Local Government. That is a great way to make an announcement, minister; the minister announces \$3.24 million but what we do not tell people is that part of that is going to be gobbled up by the bureaucrats administering it!

Talking about the bureaucrats administering it, can the minister explain the increase in fees for local government cat breeders licences? Cat breeders have contacted the office of the member for Maylands because they have had significant increases in licensing charges. Does the minister know anything about that?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is \$100 for a cat breeder.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: How much was it previously?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Probably nothing; I am not sure.

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Probably nothing. So it is a 100 per cent increase?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I have forgotten the number of hours we spent debating the Cat Act in this place but I think we acknowledged that in our community cats were a problem. I acknowledge that it is a 100 per cent increase, but the reality is we are trying to take control of an industry that is not controlled at the moment. We are trying to monitor where the cats come from and how they get into the community, and to ensure that everyone is doing the right thing. There is an issue here, but we did consult quite widely with the industry on the best way forward. The amount of work we have gone through with the agencies and every local government is very similar to the implementation of the Dog Act. The local governments are in charge of the \$100 fee. I acknowledge that it is a cost but the industry said to me it is happy to be charged because they can do cost recovery when they sell their kittens. It is the breeders we need to monitor more than anything else.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I do not want to get into a debate because the debate could be that that was not the object of the Cat Act; the object of the Cat Act was to get rid of feral cats. Does the minister think that it is justifiable when implementing a new act in a new area that cat breeders, acting as some of the “better people in the community”, can suddenly have a 100 per cent fee imposed upon them? There was no lead in; suddenly, bang! Does the minister think that is justifiable?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We consulted widely with the community. Most cat breeders sell cats. I have seen cats advertised—rag dolls—for \$700, with a litter of six to eight kittens; that is quite a considerable amount of money. I think this is an opportunity to regulate the industry. I acknowledge it is a cost but it is also a business, selling cats, so the costs would be borne out of that process. The most important thing about the legislation is that it makes sure that the cats are microchipped before they go out into the wider community so we know where they are coming from.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The breeders bear that cost.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, they do, and it is part of the cost of selling the kittens, so it is a business. The most important thing, and something we are very conscious of, is the welfare of the animals. One of the main things I want to do as the minister, and that local government wants to do, is to make sure we know where the breeders are; how many kittens they are breeding; and that this is done in the right place with the right conditions for the cats, not just the old-fashioned puppy or kitten farm in the back shed, selling out of the front door. That is where the work needs to be done. There is a cost involved in that and I think the industry is pretty happy to acknowledge that.

The cat breeders are happy for us to start regulating because the backyard operators are impacting on the proper breeders. The breeding association said the biggest impact on them was from the backyard breeders who go and grab a couple of cats. The breeders spend a lot of money and time and effort doing things like flying cats in from over east to breed so that they can get the right breed and colour. It is interesting to talk to them and see how passionate they are about their animals—their moggies. The reality is that a cost is involved but it is part of the process of trying to regulate the industry and protect the wider community because a lot of people in our community are frustrated with cats. My feedback from industry is that they are happy to pay something because through the local government association, local rangers and registration we can find out where the cats are coming from.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: If a fee of \$100 is charged to each cat breeder, where in the *Budget Statements* does it show where that income is going?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: To the local government.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: It goes to the local government, not the Department of Local Government.

Meeting suspended from 11.08 to 11.20 am

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: My question goes to page 776, where there is an item on royalties for regions and local government capacity building. A lot of commentary has been made about local government capacity over the years. I know programs have been implemented to grow that capacity in local government. I am interested to find out exactly what has been achieved and where we are at in that capacity building area?

The CHAIRMAN: Did the member mention a line item?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Yes, it is the line item “Royalties for Regions—Local Government Capacity Building”, which is the tenth line from the bottom of page 776.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member is spot-on in terms of the royalties for regions helping local governments in their structural reform. Some amazing programs have been developed through the department in addressing the

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

capacity gaps, such as training programs to assess management and financial planning, which is one of the big areas of local government in getting their financial planning in order. There are integrated planning workshops for mayors and presidents of councils, which has been a big learning curve for their integrated planning document, which quite a considerable number has done. I spoke about this issue before on getting integrated planning done to look at their cost-of-life facilities and community assets to make sure they look at the bigger picture sometimes. Another is better practice reviews to be conducted in selected local governments, which is about their work practices in their environment and how they deliver their services to their ratepayers. Another one is greater alignment of state and local government planning procedures. This has been a big issue for local governments trying to get their town planning schemes up to date. It has been an issue for a number of years with local governments having out-of-date planning schemes and up to 150 amendments in their town planning schemes, so it is time for review. It is also about assisting local governments to better align planning documents with the state government. It is also about establishing a local government management information system to effectively manage performance, compliance and data recording. The amount of \$3 million a year has been allocated to the country local government fund over the next four years. We still have a lot of work to do to make sure local government is at capacity and ticking those boxes.

In the last five years, since coming to government, local government has become far better resourced with the right documents. They have all done some sort of community facility report, which involved engaging with their community to find out what was needed in their communities and engaging through strategic planning to try to work out where their assets are and how they can best use and maintain them. The aim is to get the capacity to local governments to deliver those services.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the “Beyond Gambling Grants” line item under “Spending Changes” on page 776. I note that no expenditure has been allocated after this year and I want to know why.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The line item “Beyond Gambling Grants” 2012–13 estimated actual was \$1 017 000.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: There does not seem to be any allocation at all.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The estimated actual in 2012–13 was \$1.5 million and the 2012–13 budget was \$460 000. It is estimated at \$460 000 in the out years.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Sorry, can the minister repeat that because someone else was talking to me and I was distracted.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes. The 2012–13 budget was \$460 000. There is a line item of \$1 017 000 because there was a spending change. The Department of Local Government and Communities and the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor have partnered to provide the beyond gambling grants program to enable non-profit community organisations and local governments to deliver local solutions to address problem social gambling issues. The beyond gambling grants program is expected to be \$2.5 million; \$2.4 million in the grants program for 2011–12 and the \$500 000 program for 2013–14. For 2012–13, we approved \$1.5 million in grant payments that were fully recouped from the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor. This resulted in the program for 2012–13 being \$1 million higher than the budget estimate of \$500 000. So, the member’s question in particular is —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Page 785 is better to look at that, I am sorry. So there are no spending changes because it is in fact recouped from the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor. The estimate for the out years is \$460 000. Does that mean that the contribution from the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor is larger? What is the story there? Has that whole program been downsized?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will get some information about the amount and where it was coming from. We identified in 2012–13 that of the \$1.5 million, the Australian Asian Association beyond gambling project in the metropolitan area got \$67 000; the David Wirrpanda Foundation’s Troy Cook health and leadership program got \$168 000 for the metropolitan area; the Greater Bunbury Division of General Practice got \$186 000 for the south west; the Kalumburu Aboriginal Corporation beyond gambling project got \$188 000 in the Kimberley; MercyCare’s service Have Fun, Play Smart got \$77 000 in the metropolitan area; Mission Australia’s WA Gambling Education Service for Offenders project got \$170 000; the Multicultural Services Centre of Western Australia’s Games People Play program got \$166 000; Relationships Australia Inc’s Beyond Gambling in the WA Chinese Community project got \$98 000 in the metropolitan area; the Federation of Western Australian Police and Community Youth Centres’ Better Things We Do Than Bet program got \$193 000; and the Swan Districts Football Club v Swans program for an active lifestyle got \$198 000. Therefore, \$1.5 million was paid out in 2012–13. As the money rolls forward—\$460 000 from the department—we are still working with them on that.

[11.30 am]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I am asking about the quantum allocated under those grants, which seems to have diminished. Is that true? That is a yes or no answer.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No, I think the grants stay the same as we move forward, but I will get some clarification around the amount.

My understanding is that this is part of the partnership with the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor on rolling out this money and on trying to find the best use for it. We are still working on that and reporting back to Racing and Gaming to acknowledge the number of programs that we offer and where they are. We have identified that there is a need, and we are trying to work within the resources we have in accessing that money from the department and getting it out.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I thought the minister would be comparing apples with apples. Whatever the ultimate source of the money is, the budget papers at page 785 show an estimated actual of \$1.5 million for 2012–13 and \$460 000 in the next year. To a financial illiterate like me, that means the grants have gone down 60 per cent.

Mr C. Johnson: My understanding of that particular grant is that a negotiation process occurs between the two departments. And, obviously, depending on the level of funding that the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor has and I guess the level of—for want of a better word—organisations and things like that out there that may be able to provide this type of service, they negotiate how much money will actually go into that program. That reflects, I guess, the level of funding at this point. In 2012–13 the budget was only \$460 000, but clearly the funding we actually got and what we spent was actually \$1.5 million. I think it is subject to negotiation basically.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I have a further and last question on this topic. The revenue therefore from racing and gaming was less. Can the minister confirm that the demand has probably increased? Is that money sourced from racing and gaming; in fact, from the gambling tax?

Ms M. Dawkins: I have a little bit of information. My understanding is that this was from a levy on some of the casino operations and that it is variable across years. The exact technicalities of that I am not 100 per cent sure about, but it is something that the Minister for Racing and Gaming would be better across.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Mandurah.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister had not finished. I think he is still being given some advice.

The CHAIRMAN: Sorry, minister.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I asked about the demand for these sorts of programs.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, and we will have that information. It is one of those things that we talk about with people from the department annually. We sit down and talk to them and we will have a very good case to sit down with them in coming months to talk about the amount of money used last year to identify the gambling problem in our community. As Margaret pointed out, depending on the amount of money available for us to give out in grants, we hope we can deliver some more of those.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Would the minister say that it is an escalating problem?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We are working on it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to controlled grants and subsidies on page 785. Obviously there is a line item for the country local government fund, but we also know from the royalties for regions budget that a significant cut has been made to the country local government fund. In relation to that, has the minister had any contact from country local governments about the impact of cuts to the country local government fund as they are provided from royalties for regions, particularly in regard to projects that were committed to but for which funds are not now available and putting those projects in peril? I will give the minister one example. In the royalties for regions division the member for Eyre highlighted the \$13.5 million Esperance waterfront works project. After interrogation of the minister, we discovered that Esperance did not meet the criteria for funds from the country local government fund. I am asking whether the minister has had any contact from country local governments, and whether the department can provide as supplementary information a full list of projects from the country local government fund that now will not be funded as a result of that cut.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for the question. The country local government fund is being redirected to more regional projects. One of the interesting things about regional projects over the last four years is the way in which we have delivered a quite considerable amount of local government funds. I think that program through royalties for regions has been a fantastic program for the regions. I think it is now time to readdress it and bring it back to the development commissions so that they can recognise regional projects that are best suited for the regions. Through those development commissions there will be opportunities for councils to apply for some

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

money for their certain projects. In answer to the member's question, the funding request for Esperance waterfront project has to go through the Department of Regional Development, which is in charge of that fund. It does not come through the country local government fund. In answer to the member's question about the number of local governments that have contacted me about the country local government fund itself, a couple of them spoke to me about it during local government week and told me of their frustration as the budget had come down by that stage. But all in all I have had very little response about access to the country local government fund.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the first dot point on page 778 on the process of local government reform in the metropolitan area. Can the minister confirm that he has ruled out implementing some of the other recommendations in the Robson report; for example, compulsory voting in local governments?

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Mandurah, I am not sure that that further question relates to the country local government fund that your first question was about.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, I have drawn a long bow.

The CHAIRMAN: I am glad the member for Mandurah agrees with that.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: But the minister seems very receptive to my question, so if I could continue, I would seek your support, Madam Chair.

The CHAIRMAN: All right.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The recommendations in the Robson report relate to compulsory voting, which of course would affect all country areas as well as metropolitan councils; the restriction on the term an elected member can serve; and I think party politics in councils was mentioned. Can the minister give me a very brief response to some of the other recommendations, particularly those I have mentioned?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member. I think the Robson report made 30 recommendations to the government. The member has identified compulsory voting, party politics; elected members and popularly elected mayors doing no more than two terms. I think they are all bundled up into what I call something that is not actually broken at the moment in the reform process. Through talking with the sector and councils, the opinion I got was that everyone was very happy with the current system and there did not seem to me to be any reason to change it. So, we have not supported it and have taken out the changes to the local government system on elected office bearers' terms, compulsory voting and party politics.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is the minister not supportive of introducing compulsory voting?

The CHAIRMAN: Is that a further question, member for Mandurah?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. The minister is not supportive of introducing compulsory voting.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No. Cabinet has decided, and the decision is that we do not support compulsory voting for local government at the moment.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I note the promotion in support of multiculturalism in Western Australia. Before I continue with this question, at the risk of losing the question and moving on to another question I have, is this a question I can ask the minister, as it is not his portfolio but it is in this division and is being looked at this evening?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Go on.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I can ask the question?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, I might be able to refer it to someone if I do not answer it myself.

[11.40 am]

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The history of the Office of Multicultural Interests is that when the departments came together, it went into local government. Will the 26 full-time equivalent positions be quarantined in the Office of Multicultural Interests now that the rest of the Department for Communities has come into the Department of Local Government? Previously, the Office of Multicultural Interests always stood apart from the Department for Communities. Despite the fact that it was brought into the new department that was created in 2007, it operated separately and had separate line items. Will those 26 FTE positions be quarantined or will they be subject to the same cuts in employees that I maintain the department needs to do, which is around 33 FTEs?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member is right; I am not the Minister for Culture and the Arts and the Office of Multicultural Interests comes under this division. I am happy to clarify the staffing levels for the member. I will ask Margaret Dawkins, as the acting director, to give some background on the numbers and how it has unfolded

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

throughout this process. Keep in mind that we are six weeks into this new entity known as the Department of Local Government and Communities, so we are still working through those issues. Margaret has some figures on the number of FTEs in the department.

Ms M. Dawkins: The page the member is reading from in the budget papers shows that there are 26 FTE positions, which relates to the efficiency indicator page, I believe. I am not sure to which page number the member referred.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I refer to “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators” on page 782. The table under “Promotion and Support of Multiculturalism in Western Australia” shows 26 FTEs for 2012–13. I assume they are the 26 FTE positions in the Office of Multicultural Interests.

Ms M. Dawkins: The way the performance indicators are measured is that the direct staff —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I want the answer.

Ms M. Dawkins: Nineteen staff work directly in the Office of Multicultural Interests. The other seven FTE positions are across the broader department in human resources, finance and the director general’s area.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: There are 19 staff —

The CHAIRMAN: Please address your question to the minister.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I can give the member more information. My acting director general might be able to offer more information on the question.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Will the 19 staff currently employed in the Office of Multicultural Interests be quarantined or will they be subject to the FTE cuts that the department needs to implement to achieve its fiscal targets?

Ms J. Mathews: My understanding is that at this point they are quarantined; that is correct. Having said that, we will obviously include the OMI as part of the department’s overall approach to strategic planning and how to best utilise resources across the department. The head of the Office of Multicultural Interests will be part of that strategic planning day to see whether there are synergies and complementarities. The 19 staff within OMI are quarantined from the cuts.

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: I refer to the grandcarers support scheme on page 776, line item 16, which the member for Girrawheen referred to. Could the minister outline how the government’s grandcarers support scheme works to support grandparents who find themselves in full-time care roles? There are several in Belmont, so I would like to know more detail about it.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for the question. Yes, the member is right. Grandcarers are a fantastic group in our community who are doing a lot of work to raise their grandkids. They end up raising their grandchildren after having raised their own children 20 or 30 years earlier. This has become a wider issue in the community as our lives get busy. Grandparents may become the primary carers as a result of marriage break-ups, illness or death. The grandparents step in and take that role as lead carers. We are setting up some guidelines on how we identify someone who is a full-time carer for their grandchildren as opposed to someone who picks up the kids from school on the odd day or has a weekend sleepover. We are going through that at the moment.

The CHAIRMAN: Order, members! It is difficult to hear the minister when there is background discussion. Minister, can you direct your voice to me? That assists the Hansard staff.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, Madam Chair. We are trying to identify the way we can service and help those grandcarers. The program will be rolled out very soon. The idea is to pay grandcarers \$400 per annum for the first child and an additional \$250 for every child after that. It is not a great deal of money, but it is some sort of support to recognise that grandcarers in our community do a fantastic job in raising their grandchildren. The majority of grandcarers would be retirees who have more time on their hands to raise their grandkids. It is a fantastic program. We are looking forward to putting together the framework and the guidelines on who can apply for this money. The program will identify grandcarers, who do a fantastic job in our community.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the fifth dot point on page 778, which relates to volunteers. I notice an observation in that bullet point about “strategies to support organisations with recruitment, retention, training, screening and management of volunteers”. What has been done to achieve those outcomes?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for the question. Volunteering is fantastic. The member for Girrawheen and I attended an awards night to recognise the great work done by volunteers in our community. I think funding of the sector has been very, very good. We have to acknowledge that each year volunteering contributes nearly \$10 billion worth of labour to our economy. One of the interesting parts of my role as Minister for Volunteering

is trying to get more sectors involved in volunteering through Volunteering WA in West Perth. Local governments provide and coordinate volunteer bases. One of the issues in remote areas, such as the Pilbara and the Kimberley, is trying to make sure that we can get a good volunteer base. Also, one of the hardest things to get is a coordinator. Local governments tend to step into this sphere to help coordinate that. It is about trying to get big councils to deliver more services. Volunteering is one of the areas within which we can do so much work for the community.

We are providing \$365 000 for Volunteering WA and \$756 000 for Volunteer Resource Centres and support throughout the state. An additional \$50 000 will be provided in grants for funding the 2014 National Volunteer Week and \$11 000 in sponsorship for the Western Australian volunteering awards, which next year will celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary. There is funding for research projects, including \$7 500 for volunteering ability, which is research to better link volunteers with suitable placements, and \$5 000 for the school volunteer research project, which aims to increase school students' participation in volunteering. In 2012 we funded the Western Australian 50 years of volunteer service badge awards ceremony. There were 30 recipients of the badge in 2012 and another 38 this year. The badge recognises people who have contributed more than 50 years of volunteering service in our community. It is a great sector to be involved with and we want to help make volunteering opportunities available to more people.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I specifically asked what measures have been taken in recruitment, retention and training and management. I asked that in the context of an Auditor General's report from last year, which referred, for example, to government agencies not training or managing their volunteers particularly well.

[11.50 am]

Ms M. Dawkins: I think the Office of the Auditor General's audit on government management of its own volunteers targeted several agencies. We have recently updated the public sector guidelines, which the Department for Communities initiated and has recently reviewed, and really broadly disbursed amongst the public sector. They are very detailed guidelines that outline agencies' responsibilities for good practice. They have been refurbished, updated and redistributed and I think we are on our way to better government management of its volunteers.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: How many FTEs in the minister's department are dedicated to the volunteering part of his portfolio?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will pass to the expert on FTEs, Margaret, in regards to that.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The answer is none, because they are all volunteers!

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I do have a big volunteer section in my Department for Communities who run a number of those programs for us in seniors and a few other areas, which is great to see. Every time I go there to see who is in there working the phones, it is always a great place to be.

Ms M. Dawkins: The minister is referring to the department's own use of volunteers in the Women's Information Service WA and the Seniors Information Service. The bulk of activity of our support to the community is through funding and consequently we have 2.61 FTE staff working as volunteers, through funding policy programs the minister has outlined.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: As the minister is aware, I think in November next year there is the big celebration in Albany for the centenary of the departure of ANZAC troops to Gallipoli. Obviously a lot of volunteers will be called for that and I wonder whether the minister's department will have any role in that coordination, for example, by giving the Volunteer Resource Centre additional funding.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Nothing concerning that has come across my desk as yet, but the member raises a good point and it is something we might want to look into.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Could I have the answer by way of supplementary information?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am happy to take on board that we will supply supplementary information about inquiries about the City of Albany's Anzac centenary celebrations next year, and I am pretty sure we will be able to find what information has been received. Could the member please outline the question?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is the minister's department providing advice, financial work and support to volunteer groups and the Volunteer Resource Centre in Albany?

[*Supplementary Information No A49.*]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will hand over to the director general, Jennifer Mathews, to add a bit more information about the Anzac centenary in Albany.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Ms J. Mathews: We are obviously very well aware of the major event happening in Albany and we will work and liaise with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to look at the options for making optimal use of volunteers.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: In the Caravan and Camping Grounds Act review line item under “Spending Changes” on page 776 of the *Budget Statements* there is \$100 000 allocated for 2013–14 and in the forward estimates for 2014–15 there is \$40 000. As the minister probably knows, there has been a lot of discussion about caravans, camping and, dare I say, dump sites, and I have certainly been lobbied about that in the past. I would really like to know whether any outlines or amendments are being contemplated and when that review is happening.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The Caravan Parks and Camping Grounds Act review came out of a recommendation identified in 2009 by the Economics and Industry Standing Committee regarding caravan parks. This is a big issue, especially in rural areas of Western Australia. I spoke to some seniors groups over the last couple of weeks and they told me they have to book caravan spots in Broome a year in advance or they will not be guaranteed a site. As I mentioned before regarding the seniors portfolio, the number of seniors is increasing faster than babies are being born, and that will be big issue in the future. Part of this process is to allocate money to do some work on identifying more areas for caravan parks and camping grounds. We need to provide more low-cost accommodation for caravanning and camping. Part of the process is also getting the government as a whole to look at the issue. The committee’s report made 57 recommendations for the action plan. Money in my local government portfolio has been allocated to do some work to identify how we can get new amenities and roads, for example, into caravan and camping grounds. We will work with Main Roads on rest bays and so forth along the extended highways out of the metropolitan area to the north. We will also encourage the development of small-scale caravan facilities in small rural towns. For example, in the wheatbelt, which I travelled through just recently, the towns with reasonably good caravan parks had a good uptake of people staying there, which is also good for tourism in those local areas. Money will also be allocated to get to the next level of identifying more caravanning and camping areas, and to get local governments involved in identifying where they can facilitate the establishment of more those areas and where they can best be put. That also helps the tourism process. In the budget is an allocation of \$140 000 to review the Caravan and Camping Grounds Act, because the act has not been reviewed for quite a while. The review will look at updating the conditions in the act for caravan and camping grounds that local governments operate under.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As an aside to the caravan and camping issue, another big issue is dump points. They are critical.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, they are.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I mentioned dump points.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Someone said to me the reason that they did not like the idea of a facility making a dump area in the town is that tourists do not stop and shop; they come in and dump and leave.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In Pinjarra there is a dump point and an area where a maximum of two nights’ camping is allowed, and that could be done elsewhere. Every time I go past, it is full.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is chockers. That is a good idea.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The first dot point on page 778 of the *Budget Statements* refers to a comment the minister made earlier about a focus on the training of councillors. I acknowledge the retirement of Mayor Paddi Creevey from the City of Mandurah after 10 years of service to the city. Given the minister’s reform program, I expect that a number of very experienced councillors will not stand for their councils in the metropolitan area. In terms of the minister’s thrust to improve training for councillors, can the minister detail whether the department uses former councillors and/or current councillors—experienced ones—in councillor training? Given the reform, has the minister considered using such experienced councillors as Mayor Creevey and others to provide training for people who are interested in becoming councillors? I will tell the minister why. My concern about the reform, given that councils will get bigger, is that I honestly believe it will become more expensive for a person to stand for council. I am concerned about that because I think that not everyone will be able to afford the \$10 000 or \$15 000 minimum I believe it will cost to launch a council campaign, particularly in a large catchment. Extending the training to potential councillors or elected members is crucial. I do not want to see the day when the local president of the footy club who might be retired or in a low-paid job will not be able to afford to run a campaign to be elected even though he or she has magnificent credentials, because a council area is much bigger and the number of electors he or she needs to reach to win their confidence and their vote is much greater. I would like the minister to comment on that.

[12 noon]

[Mr N.W. Morton took the chair.]

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member has raised some good points. I spoke to Mayor Paddi Creevey on Sunday when I was at the Peel–South Fremantle game. It was not a good outcome, but it was good to catch up with Paddi and wish her all the best on her retirement. Paddi has been a great advocate for not only Mandurah but also the Peel region, and I was sad to hear that she would be stepping down this year.

The member is right in what he has said about training. The Department of Local Government does offer some training, but it is voluntary. One of the things that both the former minister and I did when we went to the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal on the issue of pay increases for councillors was that we spoke very strongly about the need to attach that increase in payment to some sort of training. I do not mind if councillors come into council with a low level of training, but in order to get to the next level, they should be required to do some training so that they have some qualifications and the right tools to enable them to make decisions. Unfortunately the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal said that it cannot enforce that—its job is just to review the wages of councillors; it is not to impose conditions such as training. The Western Australian Local Government Association also offers some training modules. The courses run by the Australian Institute of Company Directors are also very good, because they encourage councillors to think like company directors, and that is what councillors need to be like.

The member has raised some very good points, and I will hand over to my director general to talk a bit more about the use of experienced mayors and councillors for training, because that is a fantastic idea.

Ms J. Mathews: That is a very important point. We certainly acknowledge that there is a wealth of experience in elected members that we can draw upon. We conduct training in areas in which we think we can complement WALGA, because WALGA runs a series of quite specific targeted training modules for elected members. We have developed a number of initiatives for the training of elected members. Following the October council elections, we run induction workshops in Perth and the regions for new councillors, and we invite to those workshops mayors and shire presidents who can share their experiences and insights into the role and the expectations of the role. We also frequently use mayors and shire presidents as mentors, particularly if we have identified that there is an elected member who might benefit from some direct mentoring. That has been used with really good success and they have been very amenable to that. I also used that with great success in the Shire of Ashburton, where we have put in place a very strong mentoring program to assist the recently reinstated council, and that appears to be working very well.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Just to add to that, when I became a councillor in 2001, I attended a workshop on a Saturday morning for people who had expressed an interest in becoming a councillor. The shire president was at that workshop, along with a councillor, and we could ask questions about what it is like to be on council. A couple of councils offer an information day or evening so that people who are interested in becoming councillors can find out more about what needs to be done.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The problem, though, is that quite often those information sessions are held close to the election and there is not enough lead time. If councillors are now going to be paid at a much better rate than they have been in the past, we have a duty to ensure that we open up this opportunity to as many people as we can who have an interest in representing their community. Therefore, training is very important.

I have also mentioned my concern about the cost for people who want to stand for council election, particularly given that the minister is proposing to create much larger councils in the metropolitan area that will represent a much larger number of people. Can the minister make any comment about what the department might be able to do to help those people who want to stand for council election?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The issue of the reform process and making councils larger is a bit hard for the smaller councils to grapple with. But if we look, for example, at the City of Stirling, which represents over 215 000 people, and at the councillors who are elected to that council and the costs that they incur, they seem to be doing reasonably well

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The council of the City of Stirling has a ward system, and that helps to contain the number of electors that each councillor represents.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That is an interesting debate that we will need to have. One of the issues that has come across my desk is how we can ensure that there is fair representation at the table in the new councils that will come together. If two councils come together that currently have a ward system, it will be quite easy, but if two councils come together and one has a ward system and the other does not, there may be some issues. Another issue that will need to be resolved is if one council has a popularly elected mayor and the other has a mayor who is elected by the councillors. I would encourage councils to try to ensure that the election process is as democratic as possible. The member is right. There may be some cost involved.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

The member has raised the issue of compulsory voting for council elections. The voter turnout for local government elections currently runs at around 25 per cent. I always use the analogy that if a lot of people turn up to vote at a local government election, it means there are some problems with the council; if no-one turns up and there is just apathy and a council gets through with no challenges, it tells us that the council is being run pretty well. As the member for Mandurah and I both know, the only time a lot of people turn up to vote is when there is an issue in the community and they want to do something about it. However, if we go down the road of trying to help people get elected to local government, we will almost be at the stage at which we might as well make voting compulsory. I am trying to keep councils independent of the politics that we have in this place. I like the fact that elected members can work with their community and not be involved in politics. It is important that we keep politics out of local government as much as possible.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Now that we as members of Parliament can use our imprest account for training, would the minister be willing to investigate whether we can deliver that training to all state-elected officials, which is what local government effectively now is?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Can we now use our imprest account for training?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We cannot use that for training for councils, can we?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: No. But I am suggesting we open it up so that we can offer training at a reasonable rate.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Okay. The member has raised a good point. Some councils actually allocate a budget for training—it is usually very close to the line for council refreshments! One of the interesting things from my time in council was a trip to Melbourne on a Water Sensitive Cities stormwater management study tour, and that was very good, I must admit.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: And then you get your name in the local paper!

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We do get our name in the local paper! I am glad to say that the Byford Central subdivision copied that model and got an award, so I think that trip was worth it, because it was reflected back in the community. We were doing what the member for Mandurah is doing in trying to protect the Peel region by having the nutrients stripped out of the water before they get into the stormwater.

As I have said, the member for Mandurah has raised a good point, and it is something that we do need to look at. From my perspective as Minister for Local Government, I think we should show some leadership to our local councils, particularly as we are going through this reform process, to ensure that they put enough effort, time and money into making sure that elected members have the right tools to do the job. We need to raise the bar a bit, and that comes back to the comment that I made about the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal and making sure councillors are given the training that they need to enable them to do the job.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I refer to the ninth dot point on page 778 and the gender pay gap in Western Australia. During the five years of the previous government, and now under this government, the gender pay gap in Western Australia has sat at around 26.4 per cent, which is about 10 per cent higher than the national average of 17.6 per cent. Given that the women's policy area is the lowest funded of all the minister's policy areas—it receives \$69 million compared with \$145 million for carers and \$220 million for youth—given that the minister is talking about this being an important area to deliver, and given the current advice on the website on the grants for women program, which provides funding of up to \$5 000 to community organisations to develop projects, is that “confirmation of program for 2014 pending” —

[12.10 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: It is a long question, member.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: How does the minister intend, with two FTEs, to actually deliver on anything in the women's portfolio, given that absolutely no resources have been allocated to the area?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member is spot-on; I acknowledge that. I will take on board the issue of gender equality. This is one of those areas —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: This is not about gender equality; it is about pay equity.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I understand that issue. From my perspective it is a matter of trying to raise that issue. I am not the Minister for Women's Interests but I take on board that this is a line item in my portfolio, so I will do my best to address the issues the member has raised. This has been an issue for a long time. The member would agree that it is something that needs to be addressed in terms of equality —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: It has grown over time.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, and I need to work on that. I guess it is also part of the responsibility of the minister to make sure that this issue is taken up in terms of trying to reach pay equality. Hopefully I can do that with the member. I meet with the Minister for Women's Interests and the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests and our directors general on a regular basis to talk about the issues in each other's portfolios, because they do cross over quite considerably. I will raise this issue with them.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I have a further question. Given that the minister has quarantined the 19 FTEs of the Office of Multicultural Interests, will he undertake to quarantine at least the two FTEs in the women's policy area? I think it is three if we include the Women's Information Service, so let us talk about three FTEs. Will the minister ensure that the number of FTEs allocated to the women's policy area will be quarantined from the cuts that are going to occur to FTEs?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for the question. The member is right; we are going through a process of making up the Department of Local Government and Communities. We are six weeks into the new identity; it was born on 1 July this year. This is one area that has been identified in terms of the number of staff in the department and guaranteeing them. I think my director general can give a bit more information in terms of the member's direct question about the number of FTEs and the quarantining of them. She might be able to add some more. I pass to Jennifer Mathews.

Ms J. Mathews: I am happy to do that. It is really in the context of the strategic planning that we are undertaking to identify the key priority areas. I have already had a meeting with Minister Harvey, who is the Minister for Women's Interests. We have identified some key areas going forward. Some of those will look at the issue of the gender pay gap, but also areas such as women in leadership and encouraging economic independence. A range of ideas are being thought through and developed. That will be in the mix and certainly looked at carefully in the context of our strategic planning exercise—in developing our key priorities and the strategies for delivering those and, then, looking at the resources required to deliver on those priorities.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I have a further question. That has not answered my question. When the Office of Women's Interests was first established it had something like 20-odd workers; it was a separate office. As I understand it, it is now down to two workers. Will the minister quarantine the current FTE of the women's policy section of the Department of Local Government and Communities as he has done with the Office of Multicultural Interests?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will raise this issue with the Minister for Women's Interests, Hon Liza Harvey, next time I meet with her. If the member wishes to put a question on notice, I can get some qualifications of that issue for her. I think the director has answered as much as she can, as have I from my perspective as Minister for Community Services. That office sits in my department; I walked past, waved and said hello the last time I was down there, so I do know who the member is talking about. I will have to go back to the Minister for Women's Interests.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Can the minister do it by way of supplementary information?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I can take it on notice.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: A question on notice is different from supplementary information. A question on notice is something that I have to do.

The CHAIRMAN: The minister said that he will take it as a question on notice.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Not a supplementary?

The CHAIRMAN: It is at the minister's discretion. He said he would take it as a question on notice.

Ms E. EVANGEL: I refer to page 777 of the *Budget Statements* and to the second line item under "Service Summary" on community information, programs and strategy. Can the minister please comment on the concessions available under the ConcessionsWA portal, including the features it provides and what it has achieved thus far?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for Perth for the question. Around 37 state government agencies provide more than 100 concessions, rebates, subsidies and schemes, estimated at around \$1 billion in 2012-13. The ConcessionsWA portal was designed to provide a one-stop shop for information on concessions. As members can imagine, people previously had to go to a number of web pages to find information on concessions for such things as power, rates and water rates. The Department for Communities, as it was then, established this service in 2012. The portal has already received nearly 60 000 visitors since it was set up. It has been a great opportunity to streamline and improve access to information about the state government concessions that are available. As members would be aware, the WA Seniors Card provides seniors with access to discounts on shire

rates and water rates, as well as a raft of other discounts. The discounts book that is printed every two years to go with the Seniors Card is now so big that we can no longer post it out to seniors. The discounts book has turned into a mini novel. When we print the next round, it will have to be distributed through local governments and the community sector because of the cost of posting it out. It used to fit in the same envelope as the Seniors Card or information for seniors. It is now getting very big. There is some fantastic stuff for seniors, but also general concessions. This portal was part of that process to bring people to one point to find out about rebates and discounts from all those agencies. It has been fantastic. People previously had to go through up to 16 different web pages to find out what they were entitled to; now they can access that information through the ConcessionsWA portal by typing in search terms such as “WA Seniors Card”, “youth” and “Transperth 50c student fare”; information on all that sort of stuff is available through the portal.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to page 778 of the *Budget Statements* and to the fourth dot point on seniors. I have two questions I want to raise. Firstly, is the seniors’ ID card under active consideration; and, if so, has the minister allowed any money for it?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for the question. This question relates to the provision of an identity card for seniors who, for some reason, have to give up their driver’s licence and do not have a passport, so they do not have any acceptable photo identification. For instance, under the rules in place in WA for liquor licensing, if a person turns up to a nightclub or hotel and the gentleman on the door asks to see some ID, a person can use an 18-plus card, a driver’s licence or a passport. Even though in the wider community the working with children card or childcare card includes a person’s date of birth and photograph, those are not acceptable forms of photo ID under the liquor licensing legislation. We are trying to work through this issue at the moment to find a way to do this. This also comes under the Department of Transport and the Department of the Attorney General in terms of trying to get to the next level. This has been going on since 2009 when I was parliamentary secretary to the former minister. We were trying to resolve the issue then. It is quite a large issue in our community. Some seniors need photo ID to access some medication and for other general reasons. If they need to provide proof of identification—the 100 points of identification—they are limited to a birth certificate and Medicare card, as they have nothing with a photo on it. We are working towards getting to that level. We do not have the finer details back. It is more than likely that it will come through the Department of Transport, which already has a system set up. We are working with the Department of Transport at the moment on how to get a driver’s licence that is not a driver’s licence—a null and void driver’s licence—that can be used as valid ID. One thing I am conscious of is that if we were to start putting a photo on the WA Seniors Card, that would not be prescribed as being —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Under AUSTRAC it does not get the points.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Correct. We have to stay within the parameters. We are working with the Department of Transport. It has a very good system of identifying people. It may be an opportunity to utilise that as an ID for people who do not have a driver’s licence anymore. Once that is set up, it will come back to me to fund it in terms of making it accessible to our seniors at no cost to them.

[12.20 pm]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Does the minister have a time frame on that?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am expecting something very soon because I have been working on this since I became minister.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The WA Seniors Awards nomination process is quite complicated and I have had lots of complaints from my colleagues—as well as anything else. We have to either go online or use a printed form, provide referee reports, provide text on a USB drive, have photos of a certain resolution preferably provided in JPEG and dates have to be written in the American style. That is somewhat off-putting for would-be nominators of seniors, and when I compare this process with that required under the Order of Australia regime, this is much more complicated. I noticed that the award nominations were extended by a week. Is that a reflection of the lack of people applying and what is the issue?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I was not aware of the complications in nominating for a seniors award; I will take that on notice and I thank the member for that advice.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I think it is trying to shift the work to the people nominating and relieve the very few staff in the minister’s department.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We can have a look at that. I think the most important thing about the WA Seniors Awards is that they acknowledge the great work that seniors do in our community and provide the opportunity to promote a Senior of the Year during Seniors Week, as well as acknowledge a number of groups and individuals in our community that do some fantastic work. I will take that on board and try to streamline the nomination

process and maybe get it down to a round level so we can get so many nominations in and then process them down to a smaller number before getting into the details such as photos and JPEGs and thumb drives with bits and pieces on them. Maybe that can come down towards the end, but I will definitely take that on board and meet with my director and we can raise that at our next meeting.

I am keen to move on to the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I just have one more question.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will give my question to the member for Mirrabooka and then we can go on to the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I refer to page 776—I am happy to get this by way of supplementary information —

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: On notice.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: No, not on notice because that is different. I refer to services purchased from the not-for-profit sector in the “Spending Changes” table on page 776 of budget paper No 2. The minister has taken a significant amount of money out of this—\$1 560 000—in this budget estimate. What services are being cut to deliver those savings and spending changes to the department?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will hand over to our finance manager, Chris Johnson, to give the member some details and if she is still not happy with what he has given her, I will put a question on notice to help her out.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: He will be glad; he has been here all morning and he has not been asked a question!

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: He has been asked a couple.

Mr C. Johnson: The reason why that money was taken out is that we did a review of the funded services budget itself. At the time we had some issues to do with accommodation funding and the advice that we got back from Treasury was to have a look internally to see whether there was surplus funding in certain areas. We had a good look at that particular line on the funded services area and worked closely with the funded services team to make sure that the funding that it currently had and into the outward years was sufficient for it to continue delivering on its projects.

A couple of years back, Treasury did some modelling about the indexation funding that we were supposed to get—for once we benefitted from it because we got too much money; it is a bit of a rarity but it did happen—and we went back to Treasury and said there is too much money in the bucket. We know we are meeting all our commitments, we are funding all the services, but we think there is a slight excess there. We wanted to use that to address our accommodation issues; we wanted to redirect that funding out of funded services and into accommodation. Treasury said that was great and as we had some excess funds it would take them off us but we would get some extra funding for accommodation. We are still fully committed to the funded services area and it gets its full component I and full component II —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: But you got less money for accommodation?

The CHAIRMAN: Member, please direct your questions through the minister.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Is the member happy with that answer?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Sort of, but the minister got less for accommodation. If I look at services purchased from the not-for-profit sector, \$778 000 was taken away and \$350 000 given back; \$1 560 000 was taken away and \$360 000 and a bit more over the forward estimates was given back. Is that the accommodation for Local Government?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: In the same building?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes, that building.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Will that accommodation include the additional costs that the minister will need to incur for setting up computers and human resources now that the Office of Shared Services has been decommissioned? That is, to provide the HR services and any services previously provided by the Office of Shared Services.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: One of the things that will come out of bringing the Departments of Communities and Local Government together will be that we will have quite a large department and we are going to identify those needs and address them as we move forward—it has only been six weeks.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 22 August 2013]

p424c-456a

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr David Templeman; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Glenys Godfrey

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Is the minister aware that all of the Department of Communities' HR was done through the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, so the minister will not get any of that? He is going to have to provide it. I understand that the minister's department was provided for through the Office of Shared Services, so he has a big bill waiting for him for HR and computers.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I am right.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I appreciate the support.

The appropriation was recommended.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Mr Chair, we would now like to move on to the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board. Does the Chair mind if I bring my advisers from the board into the chamber—I did not bring them in this morning.

The CHAIRMAN: Certainly.