

**Division 36: Child Protection and Family Support, \$567 596 000 —**

Mr I.C. Blayney, Chairman.

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

Ms E. White, Acting Director General.

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

Mrs P. Beamish-Burton, Director, Finance.

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

**The CHAIRMAN:** I call the member for Armadale.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I refer to the service summary on page 416. How many foster carers did the department have on the books as at 30 June 2013 and how many foster carers were there as at 1 May 2014? If there are no figures available for May, could the parliamentary secretary provide the most recent figure that she does have?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** At the end of March this year, a total of 825 households were on the books.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** What about as at 30 June 2013?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** There were 817 households as at 30 June 2013.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** How many more foster households does the department need?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** I will ask Ms White to respond.

**Ms E. White:** The number of households that are required is very much determined by the number of children currently in our care and new children coming into our care. What I can offer, which will be useful to put in context, is that 60 per cent of all children who come into care are placed in households with direct relatives. They are assessed against competencies and registered as formal carers with the department. So 60 per cent are placed within the family unit, with nine per cent of all children in care placed in accommodation and care services or residential services. Traditionally, they are children with higher end complex needs to do with health, mental health and some behavioural concerns based on trauma et cetera. We would ideally like to work with those children and place them into more traditional general placements. That is an area in which we can really target the number of carers required and what sort of care they require. They are quite specialist. They require different levels of skill because of the needs of the children. We could always do with more carers.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Do you have a number that you are looking at that you need?

**Ms E. White:** Not at any one time. The total number of children in care determines the number of placements that are required. In terms of working to an actual target each year or at this current time, I do not have a number as such.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Can the parliamentary secretary provide by way of supplementary information the number of foster households that have more than two children in care at any one time? What amount did the department spend on foster care recruitment in 2012–13? What amount has been set aside for spending in 2014? What has been spent so far and what is budgeted to be spent in 2014–15?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** We do have some of that information. We will provide the member with what amount has been spent on foster caring. I will ask Ms White to provide that information.

**Ms E. White:** We launched a recruitment campaign in September 2012, which has consistently run and continues to run. It is a multilayered approach whereby we have had television commercials and coordinated and consistent radio commercials. We launched a Facebook campaign and a Google/Twitter campaign. We are forging into social media in a way that we have not traditionally. Through that campaign to date, we have had 1 445 inquiries from the general community—from the public—about becoming carers. About 230 of those have been through social media. We have about 1 500 “Likes”—that is the terminology that I am learning—through Facebook, which is an indicator of how many people are looking, considering and giving it a rating, for what that metric is worth.

[9.30 pm]

We have held 80 information sessions across Perth at which 743 potential carers, or about 494 potential households, have attended. That has translated to 188 carers being approved since September 2012. A proportion of the 667 people who lodged an interest are working their way through our assessment process; 188 have

already moved through. An amount of \$400 000 was allocated in 2012–13 to continue that campaign. That is the cost to date and, of course, going forward, particularly with Facebook and Google, it is about \$15 000 because that infrastructure has been built and it can be built upon.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Basically, I want to know what was spent in 2012–13, how much of the 2013–14 allocation has been spent so far and what the department will spend in 2014–15.

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** I need to provide supplementary information on the number of foster households with more than two children in their care and the amount of funding for foster caring in 2012–13 and 2013–14.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** How much has been spent so far in 2013–14 and what has the department budgeted for 2014–15?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** An amount of \$90 000 has been allocated in 2013–14 for recruitment and retention.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** How much has been spent so far?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** We need to clarify that.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Does the parliamentary secretary want to provide the whole thing via supplementary information?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** I think it is probably easier. We will provide the amount spent in 2012–13, the amount spent in 2013–14 so far and the allocation for 2014–15.

*[Supplementary Information No B28.]*

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** I refer to page 421 and “New Works: Computer Hardware and Software—ICT Replacement Program”. Can the parliamentary secretary tell us how much the department has spent on information technology in 2013–14 and how much it plans to spend in 2014–15? Have contracts been let for ICT replacement; and, if yes, to whom; and, if no, when will they be let? Finally, how much has been spent on Oracle’s PeopleSoft program?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** I will ask Mr Byrne to respond directly to the member’s question.

**Mr P. Byrne:** Our total budget for IT across the department is roughly \$26 million a year. I would need to provide supplementary information to give the member the exact amount, but that is our IT spend across the whole department. The ongoing provision of computer and communication hardware replacement has been allocated \$1.15 million in our 2014–15 budget and that would be roughly the same as in 2013–14.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** I suppose it is the same question: has a new contract been signed for ICT replacement; and, if yes, with whom; and, if not, when will that contract be let?

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

**Mr P. Byrne:** That procurement is performed internally by the department, so that is our spend for infrastructure replacement. We have a contract with Kinetic IT for the provision of IT services, but the procurement of the hardware is performed internally by the department.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** I repeat the last part of the original question: how much has been spent on Oracle’s PeopleSoft program?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** I will ask Mr Byrne to respond to that.

**Mr P. Byrne:** Over which time period?

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** Over the past two years.

**Mr P. Byrne:** I will have to take that on notice.

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** I will provide the amount that has been spent in the past two years on Oracle’s PeopleSoft program.

*[Supplementary Information No B29.]*

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** How many iPads have been rolled out in the department and at what cost? Which offices have been given iPads and for what purpose?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** I am looking at Mr Byrne to see whether he has that information.

**Mr P. Byrne:** I do not have that information to hand. We have rolled out quite a number of both iPhones and iPads across the department.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** Is the parliamentary secretary happy to take that as supplementary information?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** We will provide supplementary information on the number of iPads that have been rolled out in the department and at what cost, and which offices have been given iPads and for what purpose.

*[Supplementary Information No B30.]*

**Mr J. NORBERGER:** I want to ask a question on homelessness. I refer to the final dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 417. Homelessness is a very serious issue and it is becoming more so in Joondalup of late, which is obviously sad to see. Could the parliamentary secretary please provide some further details on how the government is addressing the issue of increased demand for homelessness services and what support services are available for families and individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** I agree with the member that homelessness is an issue in our society and it is not always in an obvious form; often it is in forms that we do not recognise. Once upon a time couch surfing and those other things were not regarded as homelessness, but in many ways they are. It is something to which the government is certainly committed and we are looking at different ways to address this issue.

[9.40 pm]

I suppose the other focus that the government has is on early intervention and proactive services rather than waiting until people have a problem. It is not always easy, but it has been a focus for us. Fortunately, joint state and commonwealth funding has been made available and new infrastructure has been built in the last little while. I am also enthused because 81 services are provided in this area. They are community service organisations and I think they should be commended on the work they do. Sometimes it is not a very rewarding business to be in. I will get Ms White to give a bit more information about the detail on some of those options available for people, particularly young people.

**Ms E. White:** Through to 2013–14, through the commonwealth–state partnership agreements, \$68.3 million was spent on mostly community service sector support services such as the 81 that were mentioned. It is really important to understand that there is a range of need in that sector, as we have heard. There are people in serious immediate crisis who need a particular set of responses to address their needs, but they also need to be connected to the support services that can stick with them, help restore their dignity, give them pathways to housing, address health issues and a range of social, emotional and financial issues that come with the experience of homelessness. We are quite proud to highlight that in this state, through that partnership and that spend, we are for the first time realising some pretty exciting partnership arrangements. There is even philanthropic investment from BHP. I am thinking about the Foyer Oxford facility in particular, with 98 young people getting access to a home and a pathway to education. As I have mentioned, 102 beds have come onstream through the Beacon accommodation support to single men. There is Tom Fisher House, which is an inner-city facility for very, very long-term homeless men with incredibly entrenched behaviours—again, that is through these partnerships. There is a range of services across the continuum, including preventative pathways to affordable housing et cetera. This morning there was a forum in which commonwealth, state and community sector agencies came together to review where we have been, review where we are and where we might go next, with a particular focus on innovation et cetera, and to look at some of the budget imperatives that people are working through.

**Mr J. NORBERGER:** I thank the parliamentary secretary; I appreciate that answer. As I said, I have been contacted by a number of organisations within Joondalup—church organisations and the likes of the Spiers Centre, which although it was not mentioned by name, I am sure is most likely one of the organisations that it was thought should have been commended. Can the parliamentary secretary give information about what measures are in place or are being put in place for addressing the growth of homelessness in the northern suburbs? I know some approaches in the city were mentioned.

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** I will ask Ms White to answer specifically for the northern suburbs, but I think we have talked about being proactive, if at all possible, when getting involved. Often there is the breakdown in the family situation and I am thinking about young people, which I suppose is an issue dear to my heart, so if some support can be given to the family, we can minimise the chance of a young person becoming homeless. That is an important part of the whole process as well. Ms White will give you some specific information.

**Ms E. White:** I would add regarding specific areas that there is our Entrypoint program that has come online more recently. Centrecare is the community services agency that provides that service and it is a metropolitan-wide service whereby a team is charged with the responsibility of supporting any person in any region to connect with the appropriate service—the best matched service—to their particular need. We find that the program

matches the needs of these people to their geographical location in the corridor the member has mentioned, for example. That goes part way to adding information to answer the member's question.

**Ms J. FARRER:** I refer to the fourth dot point under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" on page 417 of the *Budget Statements*. Given the high number of Aboriginal children in care, what particular strategies and programs are being used by the department to decrease the number of Aboriginal children coming into care?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** The member raises some points that are of concern to us as well. She is right that the rate of Aboriginal children who enter the care of the CEO is twice that of non-Aboriginal children and it is something that we are very cognisant of. We also try to place Aboriginal children, when in care, with family members, other Aboriginal carers or other Aboriginal service providers, so we try to be very cognisant of the need to link young Aboriginal children with Aboriginal people. I will ask Ms White whether she has some more specific information on that.

**Ms E. White:** The department is engaged and challenged by Aboriginal children in care and by Aboriginal families connecting and seeking services. Providing intervention into their lives is something we look at in every part of our service continuum for the opportunity to connect better with Aboriginal families, provide preventative strategies and to support the prevention of children coming into care. We have a range of specialist positions in each one of our districts such as the Aboriginal practice leader, who is a senior child protection officer whose role is to provide leadership and input into case matters, but also to grow the capacity of our workers and to connect in partnership with the community to provide better support services for Aboriginal families, with the absolute goal of preventing them from coming into care. Our child protection framework, Signs of Safety, is built on the premise that all interventions need to connect as early as possible, with the most people as possible involved in that young person's life, so safety and support can be realised through a network, through a family group or through a community group, and we are finding that that is really mobilising some different outcomes to prevent Aboriginal children coming into care. In fact, if they do come into care, they are staying for shorter periods of time. In summary, we look at the ways in which we work and see every contact with the community as an opportunity to positively impact on both the life of the child and to provide support for the family. We have a range of learning strategies, and compulsory learning strategies, for staff around working effectively, appropriately and in partnership with and for Aboriginal people, and our Signs of Safety framework works akin to an extended family model, which we find quite useful. Of course, there are our specialist Aboriginal practice leaders in each and every one of our districts and our accommodation care services.

[9.50 pm]

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I refer to the second last dot point under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" on page 417. There is reference to the successful integration of the family support network in Armadale. I am wondering what measuring criteria have been utilised to say that it has been a successful integration.

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** Before I pass over to Ms White for specific information, I guess I was surprised, when I did my reading, to discover that since 2012 the family support network had provided support to 956 families. I will ask Ms White to give more information on that for the member's particular electorate.

**Ms E. White:** There are two important points here. Firstly, we have had a 12-month evaluation of the Armadale site, which confirms the fact that it has been successful to date.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Can the parliamentary secretary tell me why? What actual criteria has been utilised to determine that it has been successful?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** I will ask Ms Benham to respond directly to the question.

**Ms K. Benham:** The evaluation was done independently by KPMG, using an extensive evaluation framework. When we set up the Armadale family support network, we included a pre and post evaluation of each individual family that came through the network service. That report is available publicly; if the member is interested, we can provide a copy. It shows the very high proportion of families who found, on their own assessment, that the service was very useful. We also have the number of families that were supported. Since April 2012, it has provided support to 956 families, and that is 2 852 clients. On a range of measures, both quantitative and qualitative, we can demonstrate the effectiveness of the network.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Can that report be provided to us?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** Formally or informally?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Just send me the website!

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** It is available online; we will make sure that the member for Armadale gets it.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** I again refer to page 419 and the heading “Protecting Children and Young People from Abuse and Harm”. I understand that there have been media reports that 58 extra child protection workers will be engaged by the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. If this is correct, where will these positions be located and when will they come online? Also, how many child protection positions are currently vacant?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** Ms White will answer.

**Ms E. White:** They will come online on 1 July. In respect of where they will be, I can say that they will be solely for front-line service delivery. We are working through an allocations process internally at the moment to ensure that they are allocated to the very best impact and value for children and families and, of course, where there is the most need in terms of demand. We could provide that information at a later date; however, we have not yet got through those allocations.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** Is the parliamentary secretary happy to provide that information when it becomes available?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** It is probably easier if we put a date on it; it could be ongoing.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** If they are all going to come online from 1 July, sometime between now and 1 July a decision will presumably have to be made about where they are going to be put.

**Ms E. White:** Today we could offer the information of 38 front-line child protection workers and 20 residential care workers. I think it would be appropriate, in a fortnight, to give more detail about the geographical locations or the actual facility; but it is 38 front-line child protection caseworkers across our 17 districts and 20 FTEs in residential care.

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** Let us make it 31 May.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** I am happy with that.

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** Just let me clarify what we are providing: the locations of the 58 FTE allocation.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** Additional child protection workers.

[*Supplementary Information No B31.*]

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** The other part of the question was: how many child protection worker positions are currently vacant?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** We have information up to March 2014 only; is that acceptable to the member?

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** That is fine.

**Ms E. White:** As of 31 March 2014, there were 29.93 FTE caseworker vacancies.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** If the department has put on 58 new ones but has that number of vacancies, is there a time frame within which the department hopes to have a full complement to fill those vacancies?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** I am sure the answer is yes.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** What is the time frame?

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** As soon as possible.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** That is not very helpful.

**Ms A.R. MITCHELL:** That is what we would expect and want, but I will ask Ms White if there is a specific target or program arranged.

**Ms E. White:** As the member will appreciate, I do not have the exact detail here, but of those 29.93, many would be already advertised and the recruitment processes will already be in train. Interviews may have been done and they will be at various points in the recruitment process. I think it is well known—we have put it on the public record many times—that recruiting to regional and remote locations is an ongoing challenge, although I would say that we have had unprecedented results over the last two years in terms of attracting staff to regional and remote locations and retaining them. We have a range of strategies in place to continue and, in fact, build on that success, through local recruitment; information nights; better and broader use of social media; pool recruitment strategies, particularly for entry-level child protection workers; and a focus on our learning and development strategies so that people come into the department, and stay, learn and grow. We have also implemented what we call our mobility policy, which has been very welcome in terms of country services. It really facilitates the movement of staff from metropolitan to country and back again in a very organised way. For example, someone sitting in Fremantle may have a house and a mortgage, and they know their neighbours, but

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Chairman; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Andrea Mitchell; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr Jan Norberger; Ms Josie Farrer

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they would be quite happy, as a skilled worker, to go and offer their services in, for example, Geraldton, but they would really want to be reassured that they could return back to Fremantle, with their neighbours and their house. The new mobility policy we have launched allows people to do that, and that is really accelerating some of our successes in recruitment and, of course, workforce movement.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Committee adjourned at 10.00 pm*

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