Division 3: Premier and Cabinet — Service 5, Innovation and ICT, $30 762 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Mr R.R. Whitby, Minister for Environment representing the Minister for Innovation and ICT.

Ms E. Roper, Director General.

Mr G. Italiano, Government Chief Information Officer.

Mr A.D. Esposti, Chief Technology Officer.

Ms E. Fells, Executive Director, State Services.

Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr P. Bouhlas, Chief Information Security Officer.

Mr J. Petersen, Chief Digital Officer.

Ms S. Franz, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

The member for Roe has a question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, chair. Minister, I refer to page 69, item 5, "Government Policy Management: ICT in relation to the ServiceWA app and legislation. On Tuesday, the Premier suggested in estimates that there would be a plethora of additions to ServiceWA. Has the department received any advice on whether legislation is required to enable these additions to ServiceWA?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thank you, member, for the question. I just want to say one thing about ServiceWA. I think the state, people around me and in the agency have done a terrific job on delivering a very useful app that works well and has stood us in good stead during COVID. I think the fact that so many people—I think it was about just short of a million people have downloaded it; something around 900 000—and it has worked very well. So, it is a very good platform, as the Premier said the other day, to add other services and to make life easier for Western Australians with a one-stop shop on their phone, given that almost a million of us have it on our smartphones. We are looking at a business case for a range of applications or services to be added to the app and we are looking very closely at what other states have done; and, indeed, the mistakes made by other states. We have tended to have this approach and we have learnt by others' mistakes and we have rolled out a very useful and robust service. But I might just answer your question in terms of whether legislation was needed.

[3.20 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, and, currently, is legislation being drafted to enable further additions?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I do not believe we are at that stage. We are still working out what those extra services would be. I might see if Mr Greg Italiano can offer a bit more about that.

Mr G. Italiano: Thank you, minister, member. It is very much dependent on the service that is under consideration. The app currently complies with all legislative requirements today. I think the Premier mentioned in estimates the other day, FuelWatch, for example. FuelWatch sits on a website today which people can access. This is a case of bringing it into the app so it does not invite necessarily any legislative tensions or it needs to look at legislation because it is already a publicly consumable service that is out there on the web today. However, good practice every time we bring a service into the app, we do a review, and we are required to do that. If there are any aspects of that new service that require us to revisit any legislation or policy, we would identify them before going live with the app. I think the Premier also, for example, mentioned a digital driver's licence, which you can imagine is going to entail a lot more diligence around various aspects and how that interacts with things like the Road Traffic Act and a whole range of things. The short answer is that some services are very straightforward and others will require more diligence before they are implemented.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Further to that, is there a time line that you foresee that the app could get additional functionality and include those services that you just mentioned? Has the business case got a time line attached to it?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I might get Greg to continue.

Mr G. Italiano: In keeping with my previous answer, our intent at the moment is to introduce services as quickly as possible for those services that can be introduced with a minimum degree of technical work or do not invite other matters, such as the member referred to earlier around legislation. That is what we are working on at the moment and we are working through that pipeline of services. We would hope to have a list of services in which we could maintain an intensity where new services would be going into the app on sort of a four to eight-week basis for those easier to introduce services. For those services that are more complex, require more work, and may also require additional funding to implement, those will be the subject of a future submission to government.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: One of the concerns that has been raised over the last year or two is the tracking ability of these particular type of apps, such as ServiceWA. The question is sort of a civil rights question, I suppose, in the fact that this will only increase the amount of potential tracking of our citizens in WA. Are there any potential safeguards in that business case relating to privacy, around people's movements and the like, because, let us face it, it appears to be an increasing trend that people's information is out there? We saw those initial infringements, if you like, when the information was used by police a year or so back. I guess the question is: is there anything in the business case which will improve the safety of that information?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member raises a very legitimate concern and it is one that the government shares. Whenever the government implements a process where people are putting information online, there are definite parameters put around that to protect it. I am not as technically minded as Mr Italiano, but I am sure he can elaborate in a moment in terms of the anonymisation of data—so, when it is used and transferred. The point I make is that it is good to remember this issue, because any one of us with a Facebook site, Twitter or whatever other social media we might use, are already putting a lot of data about ourselves out there, and I would suggest that there is a lot more data about us as individuals on social or commercial sites than there would be on the ServiceWA app. We certainly know that that information is protected and it has to have a reputation for security, because we want to encourage people to trust it. I think the fact that so many Western Australians do have ServiceWA on their phones is testament that there is that trust in the process.

Before Mr Italiano elaborates, it is exciting; it is a world-class app. The team within the WA government has done a great job in putting this together, so there is the opportunity for us to parlay that into a better service for citizens. An online licence was mentioned. We need to get that right because it is very important and it needs to be trusted and accepted by other states or maybe other organisations. There have been some teething problems in New South Wales, I understand. There are other opportunities for people to be aware of payments that are due through a central app or, indeed, making payments to the government or the government making payments to them. There is invoicing for small business to speed up the process of settling accounts, especially in the case of small businesses where cash flow is an issue. We would be mad not to make the most of this service and we know that is the way the world is going, but security, obviously, has to be front and centre, and is front and centre whenever we develop a new application. I will hand over to Mr Italiano.

Mr G. Italiano: In relation to the app itself, I will probably just note a few of the measures that have been taken to protect data in the app and secure it. First of all, all the data is stored within commercial data centres in Australia. There is no information stored offshore. The app itself has been through a number of cybersecurity reviews. The member might not necessarily be aware, but within my office is the state cyber security unit, so we have access to very skilled information security—individuals who have done a lot of work looking at the app to make sure that it is both technically sound and also secure. The information is encrypted both at rest and in movement, and because we interacted with the commonwealth government when we built the app, we had to import the vaccination certificate, as the member may be aware. We had then to comply with the commonwealth Privacy Act and undertake a privacy impact assessment before the app went live. We have taken a number of measures to protect, but we never rest because security is dynamic and threats continue, so the office continues week in and week out to look at ways in which we can enhance that. We have also taken the opportunity to have the app monitored by our state cybersecurity operation centre. in terms of logging and looking at movement in and out, authorisation of people who can access; all of that is monitored, essentially, by our cyber operations centre.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I appreciate that there will be some uses. When I have to sit out on my front veranda at the house in Katanning to try and connect to the Department of Transport to pay my registration et cetera, it is very testing, so I can see the uses. I want to make the point that, even yesterday on education in estimates, we were talking about the fact that the online data of our students through things like NAPLAN and so on is now potentially at risk. I think there were 18 million potential incursions in relation to students' data. When we increase the usage of it to our citizens in WA, we are always increasing the potential for that data to be used by some of these corporations. I look forward to potentially some good uses of it, but I worry about the flow-on effects.

[3.30 pm]

Mr R.R. WHITBY: There are two aspects to that. One is whether that information is made available commercially to third parties, and I do not believe that is an intention of the government; and the other concern is being subject to a cyber attack. Every jurisdiction on the planet gets those many thousands of times each year and we are no different. The issue is whether they are able to penetrate the system. We obviously have a range of safeguards. Mr Italiano mentioned the security operations centre, which is an initiative to handle this. We are engaging with agencies across government on a number of cyber initiatives. We are developing cybersecurity policies and guidelines to assist all WA government entities; developing and publishing cybersecurity guidance for the sector; providing technical cybersecurity services to the WA government organisations; and improving cybersecurity awareness training within agencies. So there is a lot going on. When the government makes an investment, it will take on the highest quality security arrangements. Given that we are bombarded with attacks thousands of times a year, the actual number that that turns into an actual incident, which is different from an attack—an attack is an attempt, which means it does not necessarily result in a breach—is very small by comparison. I am not sure that there have been any significant issues, but we need to be prepared for this. In the wider spectrum, there are claims about state actors getting involved, too. I am confident that we have the very best technology, but it is obviously something we need to always be prepared for.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Minister, when the business cases and the like go forward, will there be a campaign, I guess, for the uptake of the ServiceWA app, which I think you have pretty well confirmed? Can you also confirm who will be the minister responsible for the app? Will it be the Premier or another minister?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The Minister for Innovation and ICT, Hon Stephen Dawson. The member is right that with any new service there will be free publicity through the media, but also a paid publicity campaign to get the information out to the community.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Member for Thornlie, you have a question?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Thank you, chair. My question relates to service 5. On page 69, under the second note, mention is made of the whole-of-government data linkage and analytics project. I am interested to know to what extent that relates to the relationship with the commonwealth government and the sharing of data with the commonwealth, and the benefits that we can receive from data analytics when they are conducted at that national level.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thank you, member. We know recently that the application of the proof of vaccination involved interacting with the commonwealth government through the MyGov account in terms of confirming identity. It was a process that even I was able to do without my teenage children to help me. That was an example of that. I can see other opportunities for linking in with the commonwealth in terms of services. But that way of proving your identity is critical, obviously, because if you can do that and establish an identity, then you are not having to go through that again each time when you are signing up for another service. It is a trusted single source of identity confirmation. In terms of other sorts of liaison with the commonwealth, I might get Mr Italiano to elaborate on data linkage.

Mr G. Italiano: This capability that is being established through the funding in this budget is primarily targeting re-establishing a single linkage spine for all linked data in Western Australia, be it health or other sectors. That will create a much richer and more accessible data asset to be used for a range of purposes. Obviously, those purposes have to be approved and passed through the relevant processes. In terms of the commonwealth, we have seen a distinct change in the willingness to share data between the commonwealth and the state over the course of COVID, and a lot of the previous barriers to sharing were overcome more readily than in the past. We have now built up a good relationship with the commonwealth. We have the technical capability to share the data safely. We adopt similar approaches to the commonwealth in the way in which we work to make sure that when data is shared, it is shared on a common understanding and basis. So our linked data asset will ultimately also be able to interact with other linked data assets, and of course one of the crucial aspects of that is the ability to preserve privacy in linked data, so sensitive information relating to health and the like is exchanged in an appropriate manner. There are many cases where services like health, for example, have both commonwealth-provided aspects to them as well as state, and the ability therefore to look across those things. The sharing of vaccination information is a classic example. The AIR, the Australian Immunisation Register is a commonwealth data asset. That was something that was shared with the state during the course of the pandemic.

Ms L. METTAM: I have a question regarding budget paper No 3, page 103, underneath the "Digital Capability Fund — eInvoicing Pilot" Which agencies will be involved in this pilot? Is it a trial of just one department?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: As I mentioned before, the e-invoicing pilot is quite exciting, and I think it is going to be a good thing for many small to medium size enterprises in terms of quick payment. As the member knows, cash flow is a real issue, and quick payment is a good assistance to small businesses managing their business. So the pilot involves connecting at this stage three pilot agencies. I can reveal to you that the first two of those are the Department of Justice, Main Roads WA, and we are still working on a third pilot agency to be confirmed.

Ms L. METTAM: How long will the pilot study be running for specifically for those agencies? I am making an assumption here, but I imagine that paper invoices would still be an option for some people during this time.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thanks, member. Yes. I will hand over to Mr Italiano, who is right across it.

Ms L. METTAM: And just the scope of the pilot as well.

[3.40 pm]

Mr G. Italiano: Member, the intent of the pilot is to make e-invoicing possible in those agencies through adopting certain technological capabilities. For e-invoicing to work, the entity to whom you wish to make the payment also needs to be e-invoicing capable. Not every supplier to government will be in a position to exchange an e-invoice with government, but, increasingly, as e-invoicing is taken up, we expect more and more suppliers to be able to do that. Many of the off-the-shelf accounting packages such as MYOB and the like now are building in this e-invoicing capability as a standard product. This is about the government agency and the supplier being e-invoicing capable, and then, of course, the percentage that might represent of the total number of invoices in an agency at a point in time may start from a small base, but hopefully it will grow over time. We expect that as more suppliers adopt e-invoicing, they are more likely also to want to expect to be paid by government through an e-invoicing method, so we see this as something that will grow. We know that New South Wales and the commonwealth have mandated this in their jurisdiction. Given those large jurisdictions are going down this path, we expect that to also have an impact across the nation as time progresses. The short answer is that it is not about the elimination of PDFs or paper-based methods in and of themselves; it is about, over time, transitioning as many of those invoices to an e-invoicing platform as possible.

Ms L. METTAM: This technology, as you have stated, has been used in other states, and even in WA as well. What is the need for the feasibility study or for the trial? What questions are you seeking to answer?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I again refer to Mr Italiano, but I guess it is working out the systems that we have in government to be able to handle it, but also the suppliers, because not all businesses out there have actually moved across, and I guess this is an encouragement to purchase software packages that do include this capability. I can also see savings on both sides of the ledger for the supplier and the government, because there is less handling and less staff time required to handle invoices. It is just a cautious approach. We are dealing with money and taking care of invoices to suppliers, so we want to make sure that it is efficient and it is serving the purpose that we intend that it do, and that it works well. It is a good way to step it out—the Department of Justice, Main Roads and a third agency. I can see with the Department of Justice, certainly with fines and other transfers of money, that it makes sense to start there and see how it progresses.

Ms L. METTAM: I think the minister touched on this, or Mr Italiano touched on this, but given we have an older demographic who would be more challenged at using e-invoices, is there an assumption that paper invoices would still be available and invoices by postage would still be a feature going forward?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Yes, indeed. It is hard to know when that time would switch over, but I think, in business, people would probably have a younger demographic, but not always.

Ms L. METTAM: No.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Mr Italiano, do you have any thoughts on that?

Mr G. Italiano: The minister has made quite a relevant remark in that most businesses today are at least exchanging invoices via email by attaching PDFs and the like, so that is a partial digital way forward. Using postage and stamps is probably, I suspect, not used that greatly today. I cannot verify that—it is an intuition—but I think there has been movement in that direction. Certainly, we have a range of things also that we are working on around digital inclusion, and helping people with digital skills is very, very important. That is another aspect of this. We suspect that a number of businesses, even small businesses and the like, are going to be sufficiently digitally literate to be able to work with this system.

The appropriation was recommended.