

Division 36: Communities — Services 10 and 11, Disability Services; Seniors and Ageing, \$190 817 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr D.T. Punch, Minister for Disability Services; Seniors and Ageing.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Mr M. Richardson, Director, Management Accounting and Financial Analysis.

Mr M. Crevola, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms C.H. Irwin, Assistant Director General, Strategy and Partnerships.

Mr G. Mace, Executive Director, Statewide Services.

Mr P. Payne, Executive Director, Regulation and Quality.

Mrs R. Green, Deputy Director General, Community Services.

Ms M. Hailes-MacDonald, Assistant Director General.

Mr T. Palmer, Chief of Staff, Minister for Disability Services; Seniors and Ageing.

Ms J. Houston, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mr C. Roberts, Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information 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 principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the service summary on page 519 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and to items 10, 11 and 12, which outline the state government's contribution to disability services in Western Australia over the forward estimates from 2021–22 to 2023–24. Can the minister confirm that the total state government investment in disability services in WA over the four years to 2023–24 is \$4.57 billion?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that that is correct.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister confirm that for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, it is \$3.87 billion?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is listed in those numbers and if the member has added them up to be that figure, I will accept that addition. I have not added up those figures.

Ms L. METTAM: I also understand that the total for the state's contribution to the residual state-run disability services is \$701.3 million. Does the funding provision for the state-run disability services provide funding for the state government to be the provider of emergency or crisis services when there is a market failure, particularly in regional, rural and remote parts of WA?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Can the member repeat that question?

Ms L. METTAM: Does the funding provision for state-run disability services, not for the NDIS but for the state component of funding for disability, provide for emergency or crisis services when there is a market failure?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is funding for the provision of some services by the agency. They are not specific to a market failure or an emergency situation, but the NDIS has been looking at the thin market issue in the north west, particularly in the Kimberley. It has a responsibility to help facilitate capacity building within those areas. Although we might not have a particular fund for crisis-type arrangements or emergency-type arrangements, there are arrangements through the department's normal services to work with the NDIS to find solutions to particular issues as they arise.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the funding provision for state-run disability services provide funding for the full implementation of the state disability strategy over the forward estimates?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is some funding to support the state disability strategy, particularly in the \$5 million innovation fund. That fund is being developed on the co-design principle with the sector. How that is rolled out to support the strategy will be determined jointly with the sector. The implementation of the state disability strategy is not just the responsibility of this department. The department has an oversight role for that strategy through the office, but it is incumbent on all agencies, as has occurred, for example, with housing, to examine that strategy and then look at how the various components and arms within government might support delivery of the outcomes.

Ms L. METTAM: Does it make up only a small proportion of the state disability strategy over the forward estimates? This strategy is very important and I appreciate that a lot of work has been undertaken to invest in it. My understanding is that was only \$2.6 million for four years. Why is it such a small proportion of what is required?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is a \$5 million innovation fund and \$13.7 million will go into the office of disability to help drive the strategy. I think there is quite a significant amount of resource going into that strategy and, as I indicated, it is a whole-of-government responsibility. Responsibility for the delivery of that strategy will be across the whole of government, but, equally, it includes the sector as well. It is a collective responsibility for a strategy that was collectively co-designed with the sector.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 138 of budget paper No 3, the *Economic and fiscal outlook*. Under the heading “Office of Disability” it indicates that the state government will establish and operate the department’s office of disability, with an additional \$13.4 million to be spent over 2021–22 to 2024–25, and that the office will lead the state strategic policy and stewardship funding. Can the minister advise whether this funding includes funding to implement the state disability strategy and its action plans?

[9.10 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Sorry, member. Can you repeat the last part of that question?

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister advise whether this funding includes funding to implement the state disability strategy and its action plans?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Is this part of this division or division 2?

Ms L. METTAM: It is under the *Economic and fiscal outlook*, office of disability.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Is that not budget paper No 3?

Ms L. METTAM: It is in the *Economic and fiscal outlook*.

The CHAIR: It is the office of disability. Is that something that sits under your portfolio, minister?

Ms L. METTAM: There is probably another line item that I can use.

The CHAIR: It is a legitimate question.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Okay.

The CHAIR: But whether there is specific detail in one of the other budget papers for it, there probably is. It is really up to you how you want to respond, minister.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Sorry, member. I was distracted with the issue of which division it was in. Can the member just give me, again, the core question and I will focus totally on it.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay. Regarding the funding that has been provided for the new office of disability, is any of that funding for the disability strategy and the action items that are part of that?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The funding is for the operation of the office. It is actually something that the sector itself called for as part of the strategy development, so the sector as a whole is keenly awaiting the office. The amount of money will not provide direct grants et cetera to the sector; it is about the delivery of the funded programs that we have allocated. The office is equally about looking after the management of our relationship with the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the federal government. It is about looking at supporting access and inclusion both within the public sector and across the state. The office will also be concerned with government and legislation, so it has a raft of responsibilities, which are essentially about managing the state’s interests in disability and ensuring that the state in its engagement with disability is grounded with the sector as a whole. As the member would know, one of the key messages from the disability sector is that it does things with people, not for people or on behalf of people. Therefore, the office has a really important role in ensuring that that perspective is there not only within the agency as a whole, but also in terms of how the government deals with the issue of disability both at a state level, with participants, and a federal level in terms of both the commonwealth government and the NDIS.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister outline the core functions of the office of disability and how the \$13.4 million will be expended over the forward estimates?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There are four functions. The first function is supporting access and inclusion. Inclusion is a particularly important one because that is the key message that I get continually from the sector as a whole. Inclusion looks at the development of the sector itself, particularly as we transition into the full NDIS, and at stewardship in the sense of ensuring that what the state expected out of the NDIS is actually what is delivered. I certainly had an awful lot of feedback and anxiety from the sector about the manner in which the NDIS is being rolled out within our state, and I am sure that the member will have had the same inquiries through her electorate office that I am getting through mine in that respect. That is a very fundamental issue in terms of how we ensure that the NDIS delivers not only in a high-volume market such as Perth—to use those market terms that the NDIS uses—but also for people who are in the Kimberley, the Pilbara or the central wheatbelt where the circumstances are very different.

This office will articulate that narrative for us and provide leadership in terms of the engagement with the commonwealth to ensure that that happens. This links into the third function, which is about intergovernmental relations at both a ministerial council and an agency level. The NDIS has grown enormously—in fact, I am sure it might have some IT functions, member for Cottesloe. It has 11 000 people now. That is a very important aspect of the functions of this office. The fourth function is in regard to governments and legislation. We are certainly in a very different environment today than we have been previously, and we need to ensure that we are cognisant of the legislative framework that rolls out, not only in respect of disabilities, but also where other aspects of legislative action might have an impact on disability, and that we make conscious decisions around that.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister outline what FTEs will be allocated to this office, the position that will head the office and who they will report to?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There are 27 FTEs this financial year. The position has a responsibility to the assistant director general for strategy and partnerships and a direct relationship with the director general in terms of advice on disability. The director general, of course, reports directly to me in relation to disabilities. This office is embedded within a broader division of the agency, which I think is important because part of the rationale for bringing Communities together was to start to build that seamlessness between different aspects of community services, but because disability is so fundamentally important in terms of getting it right, this position also has a direct accountability to the director general.

Ms L. METTAM: Did the minister say that the office has been established already? I just have a question about where and when it will be operational.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The office is in the process of being established now, so we have announced it in this budget. It is located in Fremantle. I might ask the director general to comment further on that if need be.

Mr M. Rowe: Thank you for the question. We are in the process of establishing the structure of the office. As the minister implied, it has been announced in this budget. The funding is there. The FTE is there. We have an interim management arrangement. Ms Hailes-MacDonald has the lead for the office of disability for now and we are looking forward to the minister perhaps making an announcement in the fullness of time, at the appropriate juncture, about the office. We are looking forward to delivering the four outcome areas that the minister identified previously.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: If I may, chair.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am looking forward to meeting the staff because I think this is a fundamentally important part of the organisation.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister touched on the NDIS, and I understand that there will be further negotiation of the state and federal agreement in 2022 or 2023.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It will be in 2023.

Ms L. METTAM: How prepared are we in terms of being able to advocate in the best possible way for the disability sector here in WA and gather information about what makes Western Australia unique to ensure that we get the best bang for buck and all those billions of dollars for the sector?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am certainly more confident now that Minister Reynolds has agreed, and has requested the agency and the agency has agreed, to release its internal data to all states so that we can have a better understanding of the drivers within the NDIS, what the cost structures are and what the assumptions are behind some of the forward estimates. In some of the published data, I can see fundamental differences in the way that we see that data and potentially the way the commonwealth is seeing that data. I think that provides a very good basis for our Treasury to do the analysis and to look at how we make sure that the NDIS, from a financial point of view, is best suited to the needs of Western Australia. There is also a more fundamental issue with the NDIS rollout being relevant to the needs, for example, of remote Aboriginal communities or areas in regional and remote Western Australia where there are thin markets or there may be only a single provider. A number of aspects are associated with that and we are doing the work now to make sure that the current operation of the NDIS better reflects that. Certainly, the bilaterals would be part of the discussions.

[9.20 pm]

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister would no doubt be aware that there are some ongoing concerns about the demise of Lady Lawley Cottage in my electorate. The particular issue that has been raised by the parents who use that facility has been around the quality of service offered by alternative service providers. I suspect that the minister is aware of the cottage. It was particularly well set up for high-needs children to provide respite care for carers, typically parents. Now that the NDIS has come in, I understand that carers and parents enjoy availing themselves of alternative uses of the money, but of course it means that funding no longer goes there. I was encouraged by what the minister was saying before. The feedback I have had from parents is that, yes, there are alternative respite care providers, but they are saying the quality of services is variable and quite often quite low, with an inadequacy of qualified staff. Lady Lawley Cottage had six nurses on duty at all times to care for children. I was encouraged by what the minister said, but perhaps he could comment on the discussion that is going on around some minimum level of service or appropriate standards for care services provided by other parties.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I might ask the director general or Marion Hailes-MacDonald to comment on the specifics of Lady Lawley Cottage, but I would like to comment briefly on the Quality and Safeguards Commission, which is a separate entity to the NDIS. In my view, I think the commission has focused overtly on ticking the box on compliance at administrative levels. The original thinking behind the commission was that it would have a developmental component to it that would be about working with organisations or providers on how to improve quality of service. That seems to have been lost in a compliance audit role and it is something that deserves revisiting, not only for the instance the member is talking about but more generally across the sector in how we lift and support people to deliver the best quality of service that they can. I will defer to Marion if I may.

Ms M. Hailes-MacDonald: In relation to the specifics about Lady Lawley Cottage, the Australian Red Cross has engaged a consultant who is working with parents and other stakeholders to engage a range of service providers to look at how the property may be used but also how it can be used in a sustainable way. The NDIS does not pay for nursing. That has been a crux in the changes of the service delivery for Lady Lawley Cottage.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I was familiar with the Red Cross using its best endeavours to see whether it can encourage other service providers to utilise the facility and I am sure everyone dearly hopes that it is the case. It is a fantastic facility in a fabulous location. I think it really shows respect for the children who have disabilities. It has beautiful amenities and the children are not shoved away in a little, dark corner somewhere. I appreciate that the state has been helping with that. Is the agency the minister referred to a state or federal agency?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is a federal agency. It was set up as part of the development of the NDIS generally.

Dr D.J. HONEY: So I should harass my federal colleagues?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Harass at will.

Ms C.M. TONKIN: I refer to the line item “Office of Disability” under the new initiatives listed in budget paper No 2, volume 2 on page 514. Can the minister please explain why the state government has invested in the establishment of an office of disability and how it might assist community organisations, such as the Floreat Surf Life Saving Club, to provide increased opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in recreational and capacity-building activities such as surf lifesaving?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Thank you very much, member. I have to say that I have been so impressed with the member’s work in raising the profile of community services and human services needs generally within her electorate. It has been outstanding.

As we talked about earlier, I have been very proud to be part of the McGowan Labor government, which is establishing an office of disability as part of this budget. The establishment of the office will ensure disability continues to be at the forefront of the state government’s focus.

Ms L. METTAM: It is the government that went with the Geelong decision-making model as opposed to localised decision-making. That is what I hear about.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is a very good model as long as we get a minister and an NDIS that drives it and listens to the state by taking the expertise that exists within the state. I will continue with my answer to the question because I know the member has an axe to grind on that issue.

The establishment of this office will ensure that disability continues to be at the forefront of the state government’s focus. I know from my extensive consultation with the sector that it welcomes this office and looks forward to it. It will be a strong voice advocating for people with disability across government, the disability sector and the broader community. As we have discussed, it will sit within the Department of Communities. The office will drive work and innovation to advance inclusion and participation of people with disability in Western Australia. That goes to the heart of the work that I recently witnessed in the member’s electorate at the Floreat Surf Life Saving Club. It is doing excellent work. I was very impressed with the team there for engaging with young people and

getting them involved with surf lifesaving activities. As part of that, a recent election commitment of \$100 000 will go towards all-terrain wheelchairs. I will make some announcements about that very shortly. The office will support and deliver better outcomes for the 411 500 Western Australians who live with disability. It is part of our commitment to investing in key services to support all Western Australians. I thank the member for her question.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to paragraph 9.3 in budget paper No 2, volume 2, on page 517. It is regarding the seed grants to support the establishment of innovative micro-enterprises. How will this funding be allocated to businesses in Western Australia? What criteria will be looked at?

[9.30 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: As the member mentioned earlier, the state disability strategy is a very important document, and, as part of that, the inclusion of people with disability in the economic life of the community is a major platform for it. That is about people being able to access not only employment, a career and career diversity, but also the opportunity to establish microbusinesses. I have been impressed with some of the businesses that I have seen. Member, there is an excellent one in the south west. A young man with autism who lives in the Australind area has an artwork microbusiness. I met another person who has a delivery microbusiness. This funding was a pre-election commitment to boost micro enterprises, so it has been operating. There is \$250 000 that has been directed to enable the establishment of further microbusinesses and the remainder will facilitate open employment for people with disability through business mentoring to be delivered through Valued Lives, which has a track record in this area.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 160 of budget paper No 3, the *Economic and fiscal outlook*. I hope the minister can answer this question; I am going to try my luck. The government has approved a \$750 million social housing investment fund, which includes the future dwelling construction project and other initiatives. This increases the investment in social housing to \$2.1 billion. Of the \$750 million, \$222 million has been allocated to the Department of Communities for the government social housing strategy package. Can the minister advise whether this funding will be used to address the long-term shortage in accessible and affordable housing for people with a disability?

The CHAIR: Minister, this is possibly not relevant.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I think it is a bit of a stretch of the member's luck. I do commend the Minister for Housing on an excellent social housing package. As I mentioned earlier, there is an absolute commitment to make sure that people with disability are included in government policy agendas. But it is a question that would need to be directed to the Minister for Housing.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister touched on this earlier in his response to the member for Churchlands' question. I refer to page 517 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and paragraph 9.4, which states —

\$100,000 for the provision of purpose-built, all-terrain wheelchairs at beaches and in national parks so visitors with mobility issues can explore the great outdoors.

Can the minister advise how many all-terrain wheelchairs will be funded and the expected cost of an all-terrain wheelchair funded through this initiative?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: This has been an excellent program. I understand there are around 47 of these wheelchairs in the state—do not hold me to that figure. I think there are some in the member's electorate. There are certainly some in the Bunbury electorate, and I know that they have been very welcome.

There is an estimated \$10 000 per grant in the grants program to cover the cost of the wheelchairs and any ancillary issues associated with storage, matting and the like that helps facilitate the movement of beach wheelchairs on the beach. The program certainly demonstrates the McGowan government's commitment to building inclusive communities. By "inclusive", I mean that we need to be moving to a point at which it is almost seamless for people with different abilities to access all aspects of community life. That is a journey that is going to take us some time. This is one small part of that journey, but I think it is a very good part.

The CHAIR: That was a very good Dorothy, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party. Do you have another one?

Ms L. METTAM: I think we have to move to the next division.

The appropriation was recommended.