

Mr Ian Britza; Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr Paul Miles; Ms Lisa Baker; Ms Janine Freeman;
Mr Terry Waldron; Mr Frank Alban; Dr Graham Jacobs; Ms Margaret Quirk

Division 54: Local Government and Communities (Except Service 5: Promotion and Support of Multiculturalism), \$94 192 000 —

Mr I.M. Britza, Chairman.

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

Ms J. Mathews, Director General.

Mr C. Johnson, Director, Financial and Business Services.

Ms E. Delany, Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Mr R. Peters, Director, Community Funding.

Mr B. Jolly, Executive Director, Sector Regulation and Support.

Mr S. Hollingworth, Executive Director, Community Building and Services.

The CHAIRMAN: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard staff. 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. 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 principal clerk by Friday, 19 June 2015. 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 now ask the minister to introduce his advisers to the committee.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Mandurah.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the third dot point on page 624 of the *Budget Statements* that relates to the increase in the number of people aged 60 years and over and the government's targeting of concessions. I refer to the budget announcement that local government rebates will be capped at \$550. Can the minister provide a list of the local government stakeholders who were consulted regarding this proposal before the announcement was made?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for his question.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Do not preface it with that; just answer the question.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Western Australia's seniors population is growing at a fast rate. Many times I have stood in this house and spoken about the sheer growth in the number of people in Western Australia. For the past five years, the population growth has been at 23 per cent, with seniors running at 34 per cent. One of the key issues around concessions is trying to make sure that the framework around it provides for good concessions to help the wider public as a whole. The system in place went through a process of being what was called uncapped at 50 per cent. Prior to last year, the federal government was giving us \$25 million under a national partnership. After we set our budget, the federal government tore up that national agreement and took the \$25 million from us, so we had to make some changes. One of the key issues is that some seniors were getting a rebate of \$5 000, \$6 000 or \$7 000.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: How many of those were there?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I can provide that information to the member. I am happy to provide supplementary information —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I would like a detailed list of all ratepayers and councils that were recipients of any cap over \$5 000.

[*Supplementary Information No A45.*]

The CHAIRMAN: Can the minister outline what he is going to provide?

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A — Wednesday, 10 June 2015]

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Mr Ian Britza; Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr Paul Miles; Ms Lisa Baker; Ms Janine Freeman;
Mr Terry Waldron; Mr Frank Alban; Dr Graham Jacobs; Ms Margaret Quirk

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I want to clarify a couple of points. When someone puts in for a local government rebate, I do not pay it; rather, it goes through the Office of State Revenue, which pays the money to local governments. To answer the member's question —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We have not had an answer, have we?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We have, but it will be held by the Office of State Revenue, which has to provide that information —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No. The minister said in his answer to my question that he has examples of people who have been paid up to or more than \$7 000 for a rebate. The minister must have that information and I want to know it, so he will need to provide it. Do not handball it off to Treasury. That was the question.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am happy to provide that as supplementary information. The most important thing here is that what we are trying to achieve with the concession process is to put some framework around it to make sure that those who need —

The CHAIRMAN: What information is the minister going to provide?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: He has not answered the question.

The CHAIRMAN: Member!

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will provide information to the member about the number of local governments in Western Australia that received a concession at 50 per cent over the amount of \$5 000.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I want examples.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: There was a question about how we came up with a figure in that outcome. We had the most generous concession of any state in Australia—by far. The nearest one was \$260 and \$550.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN interjected.

The CHAIRMAN: Member, let the minister answer.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Since the WA Seniors Card came in and a 25 per cent discount was added to it, the concession became \$260. It has always been set at that price, and even though we talk about 25 per cent, it has actually been capped at a \$260-odd-a-year payment. We took that and doubled it for the 50 per cent to come up with the \$550.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Who determined that—was it Treasury, the minister or the minister's office?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It was done in consultation with Treasury and in line with what other states were doing at the same time.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Did the minister consult with any individual local governments about the impact that this capping would have on affected ratepayers and the cost that this would be to individual councils in terms of the gap between what they were receiving and what they administer?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: There is no actual cost to local government. A person puts their WA Seniors Card or commonwealth pension card number on the back of the rate notice and that entitles them to a discount. The council then sends the invoice to the Office of State Revenue to get its money back. There is no impact on the local government.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister is saying that this measure has no impact on local governments, yet he said that there will be a saving of between \$8 million and \$9 million a year. Where is that money going if it is not going to local government?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The money —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, savings—who is losing that?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I started off the conversation talking about the sheer growth in the number of seniors in Western Australia. Having a Seniors Card attached to a pension card with no limit of 50 per cent is not fair on someone who is getting a \$5 000 or \$6 000 rebate. The idea of a concession card is to help those who need it the most. We have harvested some savings from this process, along with the water savings. We have introduced a photo identification card, which will kick in next year. We are also investigating a stamp duty rebate for next year when the shire and water rates kick in. They do not kick in until 2016—not 2015. In addition, the Minister for Housing put a \$550 million housing package in the budget to help with more social housing.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister said to me that there would be no impact —

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: On local government.

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Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Okay. What about the impact on ratepayers—those affected? Is the minister now denying that there will be no impact on the amount that a person will pay? A person who is still eligible for the \$550 cap will pay more because that cap does not cover the gap.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Correct.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: What analysis has the department done on the impact of this on individuals or councils where there are, for example, large numbers of concession card holders or eligible concession card holders? The City of Mandurah has done it and a number of councils have fed me information that relates to a difference of up to \$150 000 or more a year. Now the minister cannot deny that it will not affect individual ratepayers.

[7.10 pm]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member is right; I agree with that. The analysis that I have done in this process informs me that 26 222 pension card holders will be \$100 worse off and 18 800 will be \$100 to \$500 worse off.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I would like that information broken down into local government areas, because more than 40 000 people are affected, and some by up to \$500. I would like a breakdown of those figures per council in Western Australia as supplementary information to what the minister has just read out.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am happy to provide that information.

[*Supplementary Information No A46.*]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: To add to that, some legislation will be brought into this house by the Minister for Finance later this year to enable the concessions for water rates and shire rates to be capped, and the member will have the opportunity to debate that in Parliament.

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, can you just confirm what you are going to provide?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I confirm that I will provide to the member which local governments the 26 222 ratepayers who will be worse off by up to \$100 and the 18 881 ratepayers who will be worse off by between \$101 and \$500 are in.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The Western Australian Local Government Association and a number of other councils have contacted me because they are concerned that this may lead to an increase in rate deferrals by those ratepayers who are affected. Of course, that will impact on councils' annual bottom lines until the rates are acquired ultimately at the person's passing. What is the minister's comment on the concern about an increase in rate deferrals?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That is an individual decision to make. As Minister for Seniors and Volunteering, I assure the member that we have a very robust Seniors Card. I could name the 16 concessions that seniors get with their cards, which is more than that provided in any other state in Australia. Two more concessions have been added, with a discount on the rebate for stamp duty and a concession for the Western Australian Photo Card. The review of the concessions took into account the views of the Western Australian Council of Social Service, the Council on the Ageing Western Australia, my Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council and others.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: But that is not related to the question I asked about rates. The concern is that ratepayers will find themselves in a financial situation in which they will opt to defer their rates, which will have an ongoing impact on a particular council. I would like the minister to tell me whether the department has any information or figures that show the percentages of rates that are deferred annually in each council? The reason for that is that if it is benchmarked, we will know whether there is an increase in the deferral of rates in the out years because of the government's change.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We do not have any evidence of that. We would have to ask each individual local government how many people have not paid their rates. That is an internal operation for a local government; it does not have much to do with the Department of Local Government and Communities in that form.

Mr P.T. MILES: I refer to the line item for local government reform in the table of spending changes on page 623 of the *Budget Statements*. One of the things that I ask the minister to respond to is the level of rate increases by local governments. This week the City of Wanneroo increased rates by double the inflation rate. Is the minister looking at any part of that reform whereby councils can be asked to justify their expenses through some third party process so that we can keep control of some of the wild spending of these local governments?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member is pretty much spot on. About the end of July last year, there was an article on the front page of *The West Australian* about rates in the metropolitan area. I think at that time the rate increase at the City of Stirling was around 3.2 per cent and at the Town of Victoria Park it was 10 per cent. The article tried

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to make a comparison with the average increase at that time, which was seven per cent, although inflation was running at three per cent, give or take a bit depending on the year. This is one of the key areas that we have to look at. As the member mentioned, we have done a fair bit of work through the local government reform process with the Western Australian Treasury Corporation to identify financial modelling around local governments and how they adjust their rates. Certainly, the member and I know, having been in council, what it is like to sit in a budget workshop, look at the previous year's budget, come up with a wish list of building projects and then work out a rate increase that will allow those to be delivered to the wider community. That is of concern to me. We do not seem to have any comparison of the rates. It concerns me as Minister for Local Government. I know that comparing the rate increase of three per cent in Stirling, which has 225 000 people, with the 10 per cent increase in Victoria Park, which has just over 25 000, is probably not comparing apples with apples.

The important thing—the member would understand this better than anyone else—is that a five per cent increase last year, a five per cent increase this year and a five per cent increase next year is not a total increase of 15 per cent; it is actually an increase of 17.5 per cent in the miracle of compounding interest. When that compounding interest is added up, the actual rate increase is quite a high percentage. We have done a fair amount of work with the WA Treasury Corporation on that. The current system in place is called the local government index and it is something that I am very keen to work on to try to find a way to get some uniformity around the rate increases and use that as a baseline.

In February this year, I tabled in Parliament a report from the Corruption and Crime Commission on the procurement processes of local government. It investigated 15 local governments and seven were found to have procurement problems. The recommendation in that report was to give oversight of it to the Auditor General. The department is looking into that and is having a conversation with the Attorney General about how to utilise the Auditor General. To take that one step further, the Economic Regulation Authority is another agency that could look at the rate increases, which would be good. What I think would be really good is a report card that stands behind me as the minister and the local governments and indicates that the Economic Regulation Authority has reviewed local governments' financial plans and rate increases. That would provide some transparency around rate increases, because there does not seem to be any rhyme or reason to some of the increases. I think I saw in the Wanneroo local paper that the increase there will be five per cent this year, and I read in the local paper in Rockingham and I received some correspondence about the large increases down there. An issue relating to the big increases is that the outer metropolitan growth councils wear the full brunt of that growth, and greenfield developments suck a local government dry, whereas a metropolitan council close to the city that has no greenfield development basically has to maintain its assets and renew stuff.

As I said to start with, it is not comparing apples with apples, and I think that is important to acknowledge. I have to work with the sector a bit more to work out how we can address that. I think the time has now come to look at how we can utilise that rate index and get an across-the-board index price that gives each local government the amount of money it needs. It is about setting a budget with the amount of money they have, not the amount of money they wish to get. It seems to be getting out of hand at the moment.

Ms L.L. BAKER: I refer to the second dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 624 of the *Budget Statements*. A number of points are made in that paragraph that I would like to explore, if I can have some scope to do that. It refers to the significant funding to the sector and a partnership forum, and then it refers to a review of procurement planning for the community services recurrent funding program to identify gaps and highlight best practice. I would like to talk about the review of procurement planning, but before I do, the paragraph goes on to state that a comprehensive stakeholder consultation process has been undertaken. Could the minister talk to me about that process and the steps in the consultation process? Without reading me a list of 3 000 non-government organisations, can he give me some idea of the scope of the consultation and things such as the number of submissions that were made et cetera?

[7.20 pm]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member would be very much aware of WACOSS and the work that it does in WA. We provide funds of \$22.5 million each year to 150 organisations. Those organisations are from the parenting, family, seniors and early childhood sectors and so forth. It is a great program. I try to visit as many of those 150 community organisations as I can. As mentioned in that paragraph, we have been doing a fair bit of work. When we merged the Department of Local Government and the Department for Communities on 1 July 2013, that brought the two agencies together. I mentioned the amount of \$22.5 million and the 150 groups that we fund. There are over 300 organisations out there.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Sorry; it says \$25.6 million.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: A total of \$22.2 million was given to more than 150 groups each year.

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Ms L.L. BAKER: The budget paper states “delivering over \$25.6 million in funded services”. It is just a small thing.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: My apologies. I will explain that. The \$22 million goes to the 150 community organisations that the member would be very much aware of. The remaining money goes into a cadet program and some other programs in the Department of Local Government and Communities. One of the key issues that we try to bring to the department is that the local government is a conduit and the community service delivers that service. We are trying to join those two elements a bit more with our Department of Local Government and Communities at the local government level. We have done a fair bit of work. My director general holds a quarterly meeting—a roundtable discussion with the Western Australian Local Government Association, Local Government Managers Australia and the Western Australian Council of Social Service—to see how we can cement this relationship a lot better. One of the key issues for me through the reform process was trying to get local governments to a level at which we are providing some community services. Unfortunately, it has not got to the point that I would like it to get to. As the member would know, there are 30 metropolitan councils in Perth. Some of them do some fantastic work for youth and seniors; others do very little and some do none, which is very frustrating for me. I can point to a couple straightaway. At the end of the day, we are trying to get a good roundtable discussion and ensure that we can deliver some good community services through local government. The round table has been working very well. We even sponsored a speaker for this year’s conference to come out and talk to us a bit about engaging more with communities at the local government level. We are trying to get local government more on board with the community sector instead of trying to go the other way.

The member’s question related to the process of consultation. In November 2014, consultants were engaged to undertake a review of the Department of Local Government and Communities’ procurement plan. This involved processing of its funds and community service. The total value of the contract was \$66 748. The review represented the first opportunity for a new department to review its planning process. The objectives of the process were to review the current process for planning; review the development of purchase programs within the Department of Local Government and Communities; benchmark the current local government and communities process against other government agencies that purchase community services; consult both internally and externally with identified stakeholders regarding planning processes for developing programs; identify the gaps in the department’s procurement planning process and ways in which the procurement planning process can be better addressed; and develop a recommendation to enable the department to ensure and identify that community needs are efficiently and effectively provided. The evaluation concluded. Consultants carried out a survey and one-on-one interviews and teleconferences. Fifty interviews were undertaken with government and non-government stakeholders. In summary, the outcome for the department was to confirm respective roles between the Department of Local Government and Communities and other state and commonwealth agencies; align the rationale for the procurement cycle, program frameworks and strategic plans; define the role and responsibility of each internal division or unit in line with the revised procurement and community needs structure; develop and implement a community needs assessment framework; develop a structured ongoing communication consultative approach; review the existing reporting framework; and introduce procedures and tools to enable analysis and collect data. That was developed through that process in November 2014 and it has been reflected in our new directions so we can see how we are going with it.

Ms L.L. BAKER: The minister mentioned that 50 interviews were conducted. Whom were they with? I do not want the whole 50. I am looking for a spread across NGOs and government.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I appreciate that. The member would like to know whom we spoke to and from what areas. I will pass over to the director general.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Maybe the minister might want to take it as a supplementary question.

Ms J. Mathews: As an overview, perhaps I could just mention that the focus of that consultation was with those organisations that we provide funded services to, so the not-for-profit sector. As the minister mentioned, we fund around 140 organisations for a range of funded services, so they were the focus of the review. We could potentially provide a list of those who were consulted.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We will provide a list of the 50 people who were interviewed by the consultant who was engaged in November 2014 to carry out that survey.

[*Supplementary Information No A47.*]

Ms L.L. BAKER: I refer to the minister’s opening comments about trying to engage local governments more in the delivery of service. I was just wondering whether the minister or his department are aware of the recent prosecutions that the United Kingdom government is undertaking against a local government borough. I could be wrong but I think it is the Rotherham Borough Council. The UK delivers services through that level of government. It has been in court on charges of child exploitation and sexual abuse because the council was

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administering the funds to various agencies within the region who were prostituting the children, including the taxidivers who were picking them up and taking them places. I understand from the UK government that three other boroughs are coming up on similar charges soon. Obviously the minister was not aware of it. I would not dream of suggesting that it would happen here but when we devolve these kinds of things at arm's length, it becomes very dangerous and there is a much greater risk.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Mitigate the risk.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Yes, mitigate the risk. My question is: has the minister thought about checks and balances if he was to keep pursuing this model?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: This is a really interesting one for us because one of the key issues for us, as the member would well understand in her former role with WACOSS, is that as a government we want to get the money onto the ground. Non-profit organisations are the best suited for putting that money on the ground. We want to put checks and measures in place but at the same time, as the member would probably understand, we do not want to make it so hard that we cannot get the money on the ground either with too much red tape involved. I think we need a bit of balance. In Western Australia, we brought in the working with children card. If anyone is involved in a non-profit organisation that deals with children, they have to have a working with children card. We are putting some checks and measures in place. That card has been in place since 2009 or 2010. Also, it is a lot cheaper for someone who works in the department to access that card. Agencies that apply for money go through other types of police clearances and so forth to ensure that we can do that cleansing at the start as much as possible. The member and I both know, where the checks and measures are in place, that the day after someone receives that card, they can be followed through. I am not sure whether we are doing any more checks during that process.

Ms J. Mathews: I will just elaborate on the minister's response. We are focusing on the area of community development rather than direct service delivery necessarily in some of those other areas. We really want to enhance local government's role in the delivery of some of the traditional areas that they work in now, such as youth services, for example, the early years, volunteering and, increasingly, the area of seniors and age-friendly communities. It is really about looking at what they are doing now and how we can build on that, in particular, through enhancing collaboration and partnerships with the not-for-profit sector. For example, we are seeing different models being used through local government and by local government. Some of them are in the area of direct service delivery but many are not and they basically contract that out to not-for-profits. There are different models for different parts of the sector, depending on their size, capacity, scale and so on. I guess what we are looking at, particularly through the community development round table and these initiatives, is really trying to enhance that capability within the local government sector, particularly through the development of materials and resources to assist that. We are operating more at the generic level.

[7.30 pm]

Ms L.L. BAKER: Can the minister tell me the name of the not-for-profits that sit at the round table?

Ms J. Mathews: It is quite a tight round table. Essentially, it brings together the CEOs—I chair it—and there is Ricky Burges, CEO of the Western Australian Local Government Association; Warren Pearce of Local Government Managers Australia; and Irina Cattalini, CEO of the Western Australian Council of Social Service. It is about developing those links and relationships between the two sectors and that is why at this point it is very much confined to representatives of those peak bodies representing the not-for-profit sector on the one hand and the local government sector on the other.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I refer to the seniors housing information service on page 632. I notice that in 2014, 2015 and 2016, an additional \$100 000 has been allocated to the seniors housing information centre. I notice in last year's local government annual report, 19 022 new WA Seniors Cards were issued. How many full-time equivalent staff were allocated to the seniors information service in 2013–14, 2014–15 and to date?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Do you mean the seniors housing kiosk?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Not the housing kiosk—that is not what I am asking about. I am asking about the seniors information service.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is the information, not the housing?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes, sorry.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: My apologies.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I am sorry; I have the wrong item.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member is talking about the seniors kiosk.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A — Wednesday, 10 June 2015]

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Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes; I mean where seniors get their Seniors Card from. I read it wrongly.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The seniors kiosk is at 140 Williams Street, next door to the seniors housing kiosk.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I am not interested in that.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The seniors kiosk is manned by volunteers.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: It is staffed, I would think—but keep going.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I have a great group of volunteers there who answer phones and help out. It is a one-stop shop with information and advice on anything to do with the WA Seniors Card. If people need information on it, it is available.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I get all of that. How many FTEs have been allocated over the last couple of years to it? How many people are employed in the seniors information service that provides people with a Seniors Card?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is an interesting question for me. A number of people go through there but if the member wants to know about direct employees, I will have to go to —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: In a minute I am going to ask the minister how many volunteers. I will tell the minister why I want to know. I have been told that the minister has not been allowing volunteers to work in the seniors information service because he is actively trying to get people off the Seniors Card, and he has put people into the service to go through the applications and take people off the Seniors Card. I want to ascertain whether that is true. Other than the minister telling me it is not true, let us do it so that we can see the facts and figures so that the minister can assure me that it is not happening.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member just made a comment about trying to get seniors off the Seniors Card. That is correct; we are doing a review.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The minister is doing a review, so it is correct.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: In Western Australia, people need only show me their birth certificate and sign the back of a WA Seniors Card.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The minister has to slow down.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: To get a WA Seniors Card in Western Australia, all people have to do is give me their date of birth and sign the back of a Seniors Card to say, “I work less than 25 hours a week.” Once that has been signed and sent to me, I issue a Seniors Card. The card covers nearly \$1 000 worth of concessions, some in the form of cash. The question has arisen about whether we are keeping checks and measures on who has a card. Have people who have a card passed away, are they still in the state or have they gone overseas while we are paying the cost-of-living rebate? We are doing a review with a mail-out to the 368 000 Seniors Card holders to make sure their details are up to date. We are going through a process to make sure there is a bit of what I call robust checking around the card, so we have some checks and measures in place. With regard to getting people off the Seniors Card, the answer is no. I am quite happy for everyone to have one; we are just making sure people are fully entitled to it.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The minister has increased that checking over the last year. He has actively taken volunteers out of the seniors’ centre and put in paid staff because he has been trying to take people off the Seniors Card in the last six months?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will get my director general to talk about how many people are employed there.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I want to know the number of volunteers and the changes that have occurred over the last year.

Ms J. Mathews: The latest changes concerning volunteers have been as a result of a fairly intense verification process undertaken in relation to Seniors Card eligibility. That is underway and has been for about a week. Because of that process, we have temporarily taken the volunteers out of that process. We believe that we needed people with a particular skill set to undertake that verification and make a range of different phone calls. It is a temporary arrangement until we complete the verification process. Once it is completed, the volunteers will be back and working within the seniors’ centre. It is a temporary arrangement while we work through this verification. We have a number of people working on verification and we needed the space and the opportunity to focus on this, and once it is completed, it will be back to business as usual.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Can the minister tell me the number of full-time equivalents such as direct employees and casual staff brought in from any agencies to go through this verification process?

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Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We might have to take that on notice and get back to the member.

[*Supplementary Information No A48.*]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will give as supplementary information how many FTE staff in the department are doing the review of the Seniors Card.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: How many volunteers has the minister asked not to turn up for their volunteering duties?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will also advise how many volunteers I have and how many are not there at the moment with the review happening.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Can the minister tell me what his target number is to take people off the Seniors Card?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: As a minister, I am very conscious of making sure that I do not wake up one morning and find out that we have been paying money to Mrs Smith or Mrs Jones, who passed away three years ago. We regularly get information from the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages to cleanse our roll. We have to make sure the right people get the money. It is taxpayers' money and I am the minister responsible for that. We are looking also at electoral rolls and drivers' licences to make sure they match. People often move house and tell everyone but not the WA seniors' centre that they have moved. With the card, they still get free transport, discount off rates and all the other benefits, but they are not registered because they have moved house. About 90 per cent of people have not matched up. We have a group at the moment to do what we call some robust checking around the 368 000 people to make sure they are all residents of Western Australia.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Given the minister has reduced the rebate for people on the Seniors Card and he is now seeking to reduce the number of people who have a Seniors Card and he is bringing in paid staff to do it and not using volunteers, in all the time he has been minister, has he ever brought paid staff into the seniors' area and put off volunteers to go through and cull Seniors Card holders? I understand he checks birth and death information and there is some integrity in the system, but this is a planned process to get people off the list. Has he ever done that before?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: At the right age, everyone is entitled to a WA Seniors Card. But as I said, if the Auditor General does an audit on the WA Seniors Card and tables a report, I will be the minister having to explain why I was paying money to the wrong people. I have made it very clear to my department that if this WA Seniors Card —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Good integrity, minister.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We need to make sure we have got this right and I am pretty sure we can turn this around in a few months. I am not getting people off the card; I am making sure that the person who holds the card is fully entitled to it, lives in Western Australia and has not moved on. That is important. Not many of the letters have come back.

[7.40 pm]

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: That is not my question. Has the minister ever done this before?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No, I have not.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The minister has never done this before. He has placed lots of faith in the integrity of the system, and I get that he is a person of integrity and that his department does not want to pay the wrong people, but this is a planned process to get people off the Seniors Card.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No, member; it is a planned process to make sure that the people who have Seniors Cards are fully entitled to them. It is about putting some robustness around the card and making sure that we are checking.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The minister has done that, but he has never done it before. For some reason, he is just doing it now.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: I refer the minister to the line item "Country Local Government Fund Capacity Building" under the heading "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies" on page 632. I want to talk about the Shire and the Town of Narrogin in my electorate. They are the last of the "doughnut" councils. They have been trying to get together and reform, and they currently have a proposal with the Local Government Advisory Board to form a single council, which I think is a sensible move. Can the minister let me know what support may be made available to assist the councils in what they are trying to achieve, which I think will be of benefit to my region?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is certainly true that the shire and the town have a very good local member. This matter has been very interesting. Barry Guest, who was a baker in Narrogin, passed away last year, but in 1974 he was

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on the town council. He told me the story that in 1974 the shire and the town tried to merge together but that the merger did not go anywhere. When I went down there for a zoning meeting, I had a photo taken with a couple of people his boys grew up with, and chatted with him about this. This has been a long story for the member as a local member, with Cuballing and Narrogin. Unfortunately, the poll kicked in in Popanyinning and spoiled that one, which is really sad. Everyone knows that Cuballing uses Narrogin for schooling, hospital, football, swimming, library and shopping, but does not pay one cent of rates to Narrogin. That is one of the key issues about reform—making sure that the ratepayers who are using the services are paying for them. With good foresight, the two Narrogins came together after that, and have settled down, and have now put in a proposal to the Local Government Advisory Board. The board has been down there and met with the community and is now processing that submission. It looks like we can start off that new identity on 1 July, 2016, and a new local government can come together to provide good services to the ratepayers. It is probably one of the last local governments in Western Australia that is what I call the old-fashioned “doughnut”. Northam was one of these five or six years ago, and now Narrogin is the last one.

In regard to the member’s question, funding is available in this year’s budget to facilitate the shire and the town coming together. The sum of \$1.2 million has been approved in this year’s budget to help that process. There will be ongoing funding as well, because as the councils come together one of the key issues they will have to work on will be a new home and all the other things that come along. That will come a bit later, and the good local member down there could probably help them out with some royalties for regions funding for other little projects they need to put together. It is good to see that, in the budget, they finally got the ring-road around Narrogin, which is a project that has been on the table for about 20 years. When I used to go down there in the 1980s, there was always a problem there. Narrogin now is looking forward to next year when the councils come together.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: Just to follow up on that, is the time line for that going to be towards the end of next year? I know we had council elections this year.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The new identity will be born on 1 July 2016, and the process continues from there.

Ms L.L. BAKER: I refer to page 632, under the heading “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”. It is quite a nice term really, because I would hate to have uncontrolled grants and subsidies somewhere. Referring to the line item “Companion Animal Shelters”, could the minister explain what the department has been putting \$200 000 into? Given that the department will not be putting in any more money after 2015–16, what will happen to all the companion animals?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: In 2012, the government announced that it would provide \$800 000 over four years to companion animal shelters, including the Cat Haven in Shenton Park, the Dogs’ Refuge Home in Shenton Park, the Animal Protection Society in Southern River, Swan Animal Haven in South Guildford, K9 Rescue in Nambeelup, and Safe, a statewide animal shelter. The Shenton Park Cat Haven and the dog refuge each received \$300 000. As the member would be aware, in 2012 the government passed the Cat Act, which came into effect on 1 November 2013, and last year the Dog Act was amended. It was identified that there would be needs. Under the Cat Act, all cats had to be snipped and chipped, so the government provided some funds to make sure that plenty of money was available for people to access those services. The money was set up in expectation of a large impact on companion animals during that time. It was always said that it would be a four-year program of \$800 000, and it will conclude at the end of this year. The program was designed to help with the implementation of the Cat Act and the changes to the Dog Act. It was never designed to be an ongoing commitment of funding. It was made very clear at the start that the funding was to help out with the legislation changes for companion animals.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Given that the funding was due to be completed, or over with, in a certain number of years, I am assuming—I heard the Treasurer use the words “glide path” quite a lot this morning, so my new words for the year will be glide path—we are trying to glide this in, or out, as the case may be. Has the minister compiled any figures for the impact on the current overpopulation of cats and dogs, and whether the funding glide path—it is not really a glide path, it is actually a crash—correlates with any decrease in the population of cats and dogs?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I think it is probably a little bit too soon to start analysing how many fewer cats we have.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Is the minister counting at the moment?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No, not at the moment, but it has only been in for one year, and I think we will still have some problems. The member will know very well that each local government has to set its own licence regime. As the minister, I would love them to come up with a uniform law that would go across the whole metropolitan area, so that I would know exactly how many cats I was allowed to keep in each local government, and if I needed more, I would have to apply for them. It would be quite simple, but that does not quite happen. The numbers will come back in the next few years, from the RSPCA, the Cat Haven and so on. Their biggest term was when the kitten

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season was on, with the dumping of kittens. Hopefully, the \$800 000 we have spent, and the money we have given to a lot of local governments to subsidise the cat sterilisation program over the past few years, will have a ripple effect, and in the next few years fewer kittens will be dumped at the Cat Haven and the RSPCA. However, we have not collected any hard data yet. I think it is still a bit too soon, and I am also concerned that some local governments have not quite grasped the new legislation for dogs and cats. With my cats, I paid \$100 for a lifetime registration, but is that enough money in reality for the local government to administer the Cat Act? The argument is that it probably is not, so that may have to be addressed by the sector. Cost recovery involves the cost to have the ranger pick up the cats and dogs against how much money the council is receiving. That is still being worked on, but at the same time I do not actually have any data. I think it is a little too soon. As for the original question, the \$800 000 was provided for the implementation of the Cat Act, to help with the snip and chip and the registration collars for those cats. The legislation is now in place, and it is up to local government to try to implement it and create a framework, and that will be a challenge for us as well.

[7.50 pm]

Ms L.L. BAKER: An amount of \$800 000 was for the Cat Act.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I just read out where the money went.

Ms L.L. BAKER: The minister did, but he also read out the Dogs' Refuge Home in Shenton Park. There are not many cats at the dog refuge. It is safe; they have a few. There are quite a few dog places in there, but that is okay; I get the picture. The funding runs out from the government this year. The minister just acknowledged he is not counting the number of cats and dogs and that it will take a while for this to take effect. If it has a big impact on lowering the populations that are overbreeding, that will be great. At the end of this year there will be no money for those agencies that are helping the minister to implement this. Unless the minister is able to make some commitments to the Western Australian agencies that are helping with this, and they see some funding past 2015–16, they really will have no way of continuing this work past the end of this year. That is pretty sad really because all the animals they are caring for, I assume, will either have to be let out or euthanased.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: This is one program that was set up. On 23 December 2012, the Premier and the former Minister for Local Government announced funding of \$800 000 over four years. It was made quite clear through that process what it was for. Companion animals are regarded as animals kept primarily by a person. It was made very clear to those organisations that it was help for the implementation of the Cat Act.

Ms L.L. BAKER: I do not question that.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It was never intended to be recurrent funding. The sum of \$2 million has gone towards cat management facilities run by local governments. Out of 138 local governments, 78 have applied for cat management facility funding and administrative costs to upgrade their facility so that they have a cat pound. Some of them need to be refitted; others need to build new homes. Over \$2 million has been spent getting local governments up to speed. Between \$800 000 and \$2 million has been spent trying to help companion animals. We have gone a long way. It was always made clear that the \$800 000 was to implement the Cat Act only; it was not for ongoing funding.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Could the minister let me know how many local governments applied to upgrade their facilities with that \$1.8 million figure he mentioned? I reckon it would be about three local governments.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will have to count them. I might give a copy to the member afterwards.

Ms L.L. BAKER: So there are quite a few?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: There are quite a few. Does the member want me to start reading out 78 —

Ms L.L. BAKER: No, I do not want the minister to do that at all. The minister would have to agree that the point is still relevant: at the end of this year the places that the minister has very kindly worked alongside to bring in these two new acts will not have the funding to continue unless they can get charity funding or funding through the kindness of donors. There is a potential glitch in the minister's plan to manage the cat and dog populations.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It was always made clear from day one when they received the \$800 000 that it was not recurrent funding. When the announcement was made, it was for \$800 000 over four years and it was divided up into those groups. It was made clear that it was not recurrent funding. I visited the Cat Haven. It spent its money on new modern shelters that separate the cats, with their own air conditioning and separate doors. Its money was used to refit a number of assets.

Ms L.L. BAKER: They are beautiful; I have seen them.

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Mr A.J. SIMPSON: So have I. I have cat hair all over my suit from when a photo was taken; it was great! It was made very clear that the funding was to get infrastructure up to standard. It was made clear from day one it was not ongoing funding. It was intended for some infrastructure upgrades over the next four years.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I refer the minister to the top of page 625. The first dot point is a continuation of significant issues impacting the agency on page 624. The focus of the government's local government reform agenda seemed to be solely on boundaries. I note the City of Swan was disappointed not to continue with reform. What benefits have local governments identified from the metropolitan reform process?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member is spot-on. This reform process started back in 2007–08 with what is called a systemic sustainability study. That study identified a number of things and was done by the local government sector. The Liberal Party came to government in 2008 and started this process of trying to get good local government reform. As the member for Swan Hills sits here tonight, Western Australia is still the only state in Australia that has not reformed its local government sector. Our boundaries have been in place for over 100 years. We still have variations of local governments, from the 220 000 ratepayers in the City of Stirling—which is bigger than the whole of the Northern Territory—down to a few thousand in the western suburbs. That is not good local government from anyone's perspective. The local government sector report states that the government will have to show some leadership to drive this along. My honest opinion is that we did about all we could with the Local Government Legislation Amendment Bill and I am very disappointed that it did not get to the final point. We have learnt something very interesting from this reform process. At the end of it, I took the opportunity to sit down with each of the two local governments that would come together. At every meeting, one was happy to keep going and the other wanted to get out for one reason only—for personal interests. It was not in the ratepayers' best interests or best for the future growth of the council; it was personal. It was about how the ward structure affected an elected member. The debate started off about boundary adjustments or where a boundary line would be moved to. No-one was happy with the boundary. Call it amalgamation or call it a boundary adjustment, there is always a perceived winner and a perceived loser. Once there is a perceived loser, all hell breaks loose and that is where we are at today.

There have been some positive outcomes. Some local governments now have a better understanding of their neighbour because they opened up their books, policies and plans and are now working closely together. The regional councils now understand each other and they are working very well together. Since coming to government in 2008, we have made councils go down the integrated planning process road. That identifies their assets today and tomorrow, and when they have to replace them. It also helps them put money aside to replace assets. It has been very good for them to look into that. They have also done some workforce plans, strategic community plans and, more importantly, the 10-year forward financial plan, which the member for Swan Hills would have done as a councillor. Now we have a better understanding about where they are. We are also working with the member for Wanneroo and the Western Australian Treasury Corporation on how to best work with local governments to come up with a better system of rate increases. Some outer metropolitan councils are sharing resources. They all have the same problem of outer metropolitan growth. The other day, the Australian Bureau of Statistics announced that the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale was the fastest growing shire in Australia. That is mainly on a percentage base because it comes off a very low rate base and is growing at a very fast rate. There are some problems, though, and greenfield growth is having a big impact. This has been working very well for my area. I am working with a large council, the City of Armadale, to help with its resources.

We got some really good information out of the toolkit. We set up the toolkit through the local government reform process and that has provided a lot of information. Local governments can access a lot of useful information from payroll and the procurement of services through to sharing resources. It has really brought a good focus back onto them. I touched on a couple of figures. Over 96 per cent of local governments have now adopted a long-term strategic community plan and 85 per cent have adopted a corporate business plan. The majority of local governments have also developed a workforce plan, long-term financial plans and asset management plans. My department is constantly monitoring them on a year-by-year basis to make sure they are familiar with them. That sets up that framework from now. Today they know exactly where they are in terms of placing their assets. Though the outcome of the reform process is not what we wanted to achieve, we have learnt a lot. It will be of benefit to use those figures and share resources and staff to make sure we can get good local government. Part of the reform process was to make sure we get good local government delivering services to their communities.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: That was three and a half minutes!

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Welcome to government!

[8.00 pm]

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A — Wednesday, 10 June 2015]

p286b-316a

Mr Ian Britza; Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr Paul Miles; Ms Lisa Baker; Ms Janine Freeman;
Mr Terry Waldron; Mr Frank Alban; Dr Graham Jacobs; Ms Margaret Quirk

Mr T.K. WALDRON: It will be a really short question. Did the minister say that the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale is now the fastest growing in —

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Australia.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: Has that overtaken Mandurah?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: This is where it is really interesting.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is how they measure it.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Correct. When I was in council in 2005, we were sending out 4 500 rate notices. We now send out nearly 9 000 rate notices. Coming off a low base, if someone who already has one house builds a second, it is a 100 per cent increase. This is compared with Byford where I think we built between 6 000 and 7 000 houses in the last five years. However, we built 15 000 houses in Harrisdale and Piara Waters in the City of Armadale, but their rate of growth is about the fifth or sixth largest in the state. We would probably build 20 000 in Wanneroo, but it depends on how we measure it. The headline reads well, but the reality is it depends on how we measure it off the low base.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: So if I had the Shire of Joondalup, would I knock over the minister?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member would. Actually, if the member had two people come in each week, he would be the fastest growing.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: That is right. I do not want to take up any more time.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the first dot point at the top of page 625 of budget paper No 2. I have a series of questions relating to the high standards of governance and accountability. Can the minister provide as supplementary information the number of existing inquiries that the Department of Local Government and Communities is currently undertaking?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: When the member says “inquiries”, does he mean commissioners or —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We have an inquiry into York and we are looking at issues in Port Hedland.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Okay.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Would the minister agree to provide a list of all of the current inquiries that the department is undertaking as supplementary information?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes. Would the member like me to provide a list of how many councils are on what I call the minister’s watchlist that I am monitoring?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am happy to provide that information about what councils are on what I call the watchlist.

[*Supplementary Information No A49.*]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: One of those councils I refer to is the current commission-led Shire of York. Can the minister inform us about the investigation of the matters relating to the show-cause notice that was issued and the resulting suspension of the Shire of York council, if those matters have been concluded? Has a final report been made, and will it be made public?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will get Brad Jolly to answer the minister’s question about whether the probity report will become public.

The Minister for Local Government, believe it or not, has very limited powers in what can be done. Everybody writes to me and tells me I should invest in their councils or do something to their council, but the reality is that there is a process in place. A number of complaints to the department about local government are from people who write to us if the local government is not doing something. Sometimes it can be about one issue; for example, an industrial development. It can also be about ongoing administration problems. One of the key things that the department will do is investigate a couple of those concerns. If it feels the issue has enough merit, it will ask the council whether it minds doing a probity report. A probity report investigates whether the department is moving its motions correctly by putting them up before the council and the council is then declaring an interest. The department also goes behind the scenes to investigate the policies that the council has adopted on all the procedures that it has to do. The probity report will be provided to me. In the case of York, the probity report came back to me and basically identified that there were some serious problems within what was called the “internal operations” of the business, but there was also a huge amount of angst among the wider community about the council laws and the way they were being dealt with. The report recommended that the Shire of York show cause why it should not be dismissed, because based on the evidence provided to me under the act,

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a condition was brought in whereby we can give people a holiday for six months. It worked well in Ashburton, and I have my fingers crossed that it will work well in York and that by July, the tension among the councillors and the staff will be relieved. The staff are the first people to wear the full brunt of these matters when things get quite heated. In York's case, the shire went through two chief executive officers in a very short time. The pressure was therefore clearly very strong in that town. The probity report has now been done and the report recommended that the councillors receive training and all the councillors have now received their training. My commissioner is now trying to do his best. He has worked through all the policies that were recommended in the probity report to make sure they have all been adopted by the council and have been reviewed. His main job has been to look at all the policies that the officers work under and make sure that they are up to date and up to speed. He will use his power as an elected commissioner and an elected member to pass those motions.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am aware of that, minister. Some people who were investigated by the department were accused of impropriety and theft et cetera.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Have those matters now been concluded? Has there been a report into those matters? I am happy to refer to the former CEO as one who had —

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Some allegations made about her.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I understand that they have been investigated and that there has been a determination. In the interests of natural justice for anybody who has had an accusation made against them in an investigation, will a final report on those matters be made public; and, if so, when?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will pass to the executive director, Brad Jolly, who has been dealing very closely with this. The allegations that were made have been investigated. Other reports have gone through other authorities as well as a result of the investigation. I am meeting with the commissioner very soon because it is getting very close to 7 or 8 July, which is when the six months is up, to work on the transition process from the commissioner back to the council, and I am working also with the administration. Regarding the report, I will hand the member over to Brad for an update on what happens in that process.

Mr B. Jolly: Thank you, minister. I could probably answer the question in a couple of ways. Firstly, as the minister touched on a bit earlier, the minister issued the shire with a show-cause notice prior to making a decision to suspend the council. That show-cause notice outlined a number of concerns that the minister had about the governance and the council's ability to govern. I think that has been construed within the York community as being an investigation but that is not the purpose of the show-cause notice. It is part of the statutory process, specifically to help inform the minister as to whether or not the shire should be suspended. A natural justice component is embedded as part of that process. By issuing the show-cause notice, the shire had an opportunity to respond to the minister. I understand that the minister took the shire's response into consideration before making the decision to suspend the shire. As the minister also touched on, around the same time, the department also undertook a probity and compliance audit of the Shire of York. The purpose of the probity and compliance audit was to examine the extent to which the shire is complying with its various statutory obligations under the Local Government Act and regulations. That report was compiled and completed, and a number of recommendations were made to the shire on how it could improve its compliance and its governance more generally.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I appreciate that, Mr Jolly, but my understanding is some people have had accusations made against them and they have been investigated by the department. When will those people be either cleared, cautioned, or have an adverse finding put against them, and when will that information be made public? The ongoing governance of the Shire of York is still to come and obviously I and everyone else would like to see that shire's governance function appropriately. Some people, having been investigated, have had adverse findings against them. What is the outcome and in what form will that outcome be published? That is what I want to know. I do not want to know that after 1 July we will have a transition back to elected members. I want to know what has happened to the investigation of those people, whether or not they have been cleared and how that information will be made public so that there is natural justice.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will hand back to Mr Jolly to clarify that.

[8.10 pm]

Mr B. Jolly: The department received a number of complaints from different people over the course of last year or so, and beyond, in relation to York. To the best of my knowledge only one of those complaints is currently active; all the other complaints have been closed. When closing those complaints, the complainants would have been notified of the outcome, and that outcome may have been that the department was not taking action or it

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may have been that the department had identified a prima facie breach of the act and that some action had been taken. To the best of my knowledge there is only one complaint outstanding at the moment.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is that against the former CEO?

Mr B. Jolly: I could not speak to the detail, I am sorry; I do not have that with me. The complaint management procedure is such that the complainant would be notified of the outcome of the department's assessment. Every time a complaint is made to the department, it is closed out in that way. I make the point that a separate inquiry was commissioned by the Shire of York, which is generically referred to as the Fitzgerald report. That inquiry collected a number of allegations from different people around the community. That process was commenced by the Shire of York, not by the department. It is not the department's investigation; it is the shire's investigation. I understand that the shire has taken legal advice on what it should do with that report and it has made the decision not to publish it, but that is the shire's report.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have a further question on the Shire of York. The minister has already indicated that the commissioner's term will conclude at the end of this month. I am aware that in the period leading up to the election in October, potentially there will be a quorum of only two councillors because of resignations and because one of the eligible councillors will be on leave. What does this mean for the ongoing good governance of the shire as the October elections approach, given that there will be only two councillors? Does the minister have any concerns regarding the capacity of governance to be delivered for the people of York? What monitoring or assessment processes will be in place to oversee this transition process?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The act is quite clear that the commissioner can stay for only six months. That is the trigger point when he must then hand back to the council. If there is not a quorum in council, it cannot operate as a council and I would have to put in place a commission to take it through to the October election. If there was a quorum, I would be happy for the council to come back.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister can authorise a reduced quorum: what is the number required for that?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I do not have the exact number for York. I will pass to Jennifer Mathews for that.

Ms J. Mathews: That is correct; the council can apply for approval to meet with a reduced quorum. In the case of York, it does depend on the number, whether there are two or three councillors.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Has the minister been informed by the existing councillors that one of them will not be there and therefore only two will be available to make decisions?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I have not been informed of anything as yet.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: If that happened, would the minister be concerned about it?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I would be. I would have to go back to the Local Government Act, which quite clearly states that there must be a quorum. If there is an insufficient number for a quorum, the council cannot hold a meeting and it cannot govern. Unless the council gets a third councillor into that room within the required time frame, I will have to put in place a commission to take the council through to the October election.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: My next question relates to the same dot point on page 625. In light of the BHP gift issue with the Perth Lord Mayor and the register that is being proposed by the City of Vincent, does the minister believe there is a need to look at the whole disclosure requirements for elected local government members? If so, what does he believe needs to be amended to make that aspect of declaration and disclosure more transparent, if it is not already?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The Mayor of Vincent raised a good point that we should have a register when we meet with developers. The member for Mandurah would understand that ministers have a diary, a calendar and a lobby register so that we can declare meetings with anyone who is a lobbyist. The government's transparency is quite clear on whom ministers meet with, and it is all transcribed. I hear the words of the Mayor of Vincent; he has a good point. The only caution I would have is about who is defined as a developer. Is it a person knocking over his house and building two units, or is it a real estate agent? Who is the lobbyist who is working for the football stadium who is trying to get the money to build the new stadium? There should be transparency across all levels of local government and that is something that needs to be addressed. The last example I can think of would be the City of Wanneroo that came unstuck with some developers. A commissioner was put in place back in the 1990s, but since then there have not been too many local governments that have come unstuck for getting involved with developers or lobbyists to the extent that the government has had to appoint a commissioner. One thing is for sure: local government needs to be more transparent about how it deals with its constituents and ratepayers. But it does not need to be made so difficult that I cannot contact my local councillor about the park down the road, for example. At the same time we must ask: what is a ratepayer, what is a lobbyist and what is a developer? There

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needs to be transparency around that and more discussion is needed about how that can be done. A couple of points have been highlighted in the past week or so about determining what councillors declare.

Another area that needs to be addressed is the declaration of gifts, which also requires more transparency around it. The member and I both know that we have an imprest account here and that it is tabled in Parliament so that it is quite clear what members did with their imprest. The same situation applies to ministerial travel; the record is fully available and transparent. That transparency is a matter that must be considered further. We often see councillors scooting overseas for conventions and functions and looking at waste-to-energy projects and so forth. It ends up with a CEO or a councillor who has governance training; there is not much transparency around that. That is something we need to work with councils on as a sector. I agree with the Mayor of Vincent that more transparency is required around that process.

Ms J. Mathews: To pick up on the member's question, we are undertaking quite a comprehensive review of the rules of conduct. We are mindful of current developments and, in particular, the new initiative that is being undertaken by the Mayor of Vincent. That is something we need to factor into our review of the rules of conduct that would be relevant to that area. I should also add that the department already has a guideline for the sector on how to deal with and conduct relations with developers.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: My question is about governance in local government, which I think is very important. There are two references on page 626. It states under key effectiveness indicators that local governments were capable and well governed. The two parts are the compliance framework and the integrated planning and reporting. What measures are there for the Minister for Local Government to gain and achieve improvements in governance in local government? The second part of my question—if I may, Madam Chair, because it has taken an hour and a quarter to ask my first question—is: what is the status of the City of Canning and the process in the performance management of improvements in governance?

[8.20 pm]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will start with the second part of the question. The former Minister for Local Government kicked off a panel inquiry into the City of Canning, the report of which is very much available to the wider community to read. The City of Canning has been the subject of a couple of inquiries in the last 20 years. I think that that is one of the key reasons behind the reform process that we are trying water down the water in Canning. I cannot deny that things are not going good for the wider community. Certain things really concern me about the City of Canning. A new group of councillors will be elected in October. The Local Government Advisory Board has just signed off on a new ward structure, so it will have an equally balanced ward structure. The former council twice voted for that. I was worried when I read the financials of the City of Canning in that it had a budget of \$44 million in rates but its wages bill was \$48 million. It is an interesting combination. Only one other council in the metro area actually spends more on wages than it receives in rate income. That council relies on other income. The most important thing is that last year the City of Canning tapped into \$10 million of its reserves to balance the books. There is a big problem in the City of Canning that has to be addressed and it will be a big issue for the new councillors who are voted in. Clearly rates will have to be increased and some services will have to be reviewed, which are two areas that only the local government can look into. We have had a very robust debate about the reform process and a very good campaign to fight for Canning. I hope that all the people who were involved for Canning will put up their hand and stand for council. I also hope that 50 per cent of people will come out and vote, because they can turn out 50 per cent when they need to in order to save their community as a whole. Hopefully, we will get good governance for the people of Canning because that really needs to happen.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Who is governing at the moment?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: There are three commissioners in there at the moment. When the panel inquiry ended, I took the opportunity to install three commissioners because the process was going to take a long time and it would have been a lot of work for only one commissioner. Steven Cole is the head commissioner. The three commissioners have a good 60 years of local government experience between them and because there are three commissioners they can share the workload. It is very similar to York, but York has a commissioner for only six months. That term will expire in October after the new election. We will get that issue sorted and hopefully get good governance for the people of Canning.

In his first question, the member referred to the governance of local government. It goes a fair way to what I call capacity building, which is an integral part of local government. As part of the reform process, the objective was to build stronger and more sustainable local governments. One of the key issues is trying to build the capacity. I have spoken already about putting focus on the business and the process of improving. I spoke about the planning process and the financial planning and of all those types of frameworks being brought into line. From year to year, all local governments should be able to quite easily, at a snapshot, look at their asset base and know

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what needs to be replaced and make sure that they are collecting rate money and banking that money to make sure that they can replace their assets. That is one of the key issues with building the sustainability of local governments. A lot of work has been done in that area. I have already spoken a fair bit about the workforce plans and the integrated planning and so forth. It is important to acknowledge that the number one issue is training for councillors. One of the key issues with York and Canning and in general areas around the metro area is trying to find a way to make sure that councillors have the right tools to do the job. We are looking to find a way to make it mandatory that all councillors have minimum training. It will be good once that is implemented, because councillors need the right tools to do the job. That is a good starting point as we travel down into the good governance of local government.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Under that outcome, local governments were capable and well governed. The percentage of local governments that did not have an action taken against them under the department's compliance framework was 60 per cent, which means that 40 per cent of local governments did have an action against them. That would be fairly concerning as the Minister for Local Government, would it not?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is pretty much a standard rule around local government. I interviewed 15 local governments and tabled a report that found seven have the 50–50 rule. The member said that 60 per cent were doing the right thing and that 40 per cent were not. That is one of my frustrations, but the problem with the Local Government Act is that it has only a certain number of tools. The Local Government Act works well for a large metropolitan council, but for a small government, such as the one in the member for Wagin's area, it means a lot of work in having to comply with all the planning policies. We are trying to put checks and measures in place, but the workforce and payroll is not big and strong enough to do that. Sometimes we almost need two local government acts, with one having a slight variation for a small local government. The budget of the City of Stirling is \$250 million while the budget of the local government in my area is \$25 million. As a side issue, I read the report of the Victorian Auditor-General and the second line states that it conducts audits on the Victorian local governments with the smallest one having a budget of \$25 million. In Western Australia there are between 70 and 80 local governments that have a budget of less than \$25 million. It is a bit different when one starts comparing apples with apples. That is one of the key issues for us.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the third dot point on page 624 and the issue of elder abuse on the very last line. The minister said in a press release that about 12 500 seniors may be experiencing abuse. What data is that figure based on?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am not quite sure. I am looking around to see whether one of my advisers can say where that figure came from. One of the key issues that was identified is that although offences against seniors have come down in the past five or 10 years in police reports of someone assaulting a senior, abuse against seniors by family members or carers has increased. Sometimes extended families feel the pressure. That is where the abuse is coming from. One of the key issues that arose from the Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council was that this is an area on which we need to focus. With regard to the quoted figure, in March 2015 Advocare released the Australia-first elder abuse national report, which is where the figure came from. I think the member may have read the report when it came out. In September last year, we launched the elder abuse helpline and developed a brochure that is circulated in chemists and doctor surgeries to raise awareness. Next Monday is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, so I will be in Forrest Place to kick off another week.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Thanks for the invitation! That is two ministers who have snubbed me today.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I only found out today that I was going!

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister said he was going to launch something on Monday.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Next Monday is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day and we are launching the week in a hope to put the spotlight on the elder abuse hotline. Hopefully, I get the chance to do some talkback radio, especially on Nightline, to talk about what is available so that people are aware. The important part is that the person who is being abused is not usually the person who calls in. It is normally a friend who rings and says what they think is happening and asks for help. That will give me an opportunity to raise awareness about this issue, which is very important.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: How many calls were received when the hotline started operating?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: In September last year, Advocare, which has the contract to deliver this service, received 120 calls for assistance. Advocare has provided more than 200 education and information sessions across Western Australia. It is estimated to have reached 2 500 participants. Advocare has noted that calls to the helpline spike when there is a promotion on, which is one of the key reasons for elder abuse week and why we are doing a launch to help increase its promotion. To ensure that the best possible promotion is successful, the helpline has also included the administration of a business case that we are working with Advocare to fund. The

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Department of Local Government and Communities assists Advocare in promoting the helpline and in the production of a suite of resources, postcards, posters and so forth distributed through seniors centres. We also fund the Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre for the Older People's Rights Service. This service provides legal, social and education assistance to senior members of the community who experience or are at risk of experiencing elder abuse. The Older People's Rights Service also undertakes community education and awareness-raising activities with seniors groups and service providers in targeting stakeholders. In the reporting from 1 July to 31 December 2014, organisations had received 114 contacts, 45 of which were made by people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. One hundred and fifteen contacts were for legal advice, 98 were for advocacy and 25 were for crisis support.

[8.30 pm]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What was the quantum of funding given to the Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre for the work that the minister mentioned?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: An amount of \$245 551 in recurrent funding has been provided to the Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre for the Older People's Rights Service.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister is certainly aware that financial elder abuse is prevalent and that it is facilitated by the use of an enduring power of attorney. I know that is not strictly speaking the minister's portfolio, but can he advise me whether the government intends to do anything to tighten up that area of the law?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I think that is done through the Public Trustee. I have recently gone through that process to help out my father-in-law and mother-in-law. I worked through that process firsthand with my wife, and I admit that it was a bit of a learning curve in filling out a lot of forms for a power of attorney and so forth. It is interesting to watch my father-in-law write in a book every time he goes shopping or puts fuel in the car. That book is audited. My wife does not like the fact that he has to do that, but I look at the system as a whole and think that at least someone is checking to make sure that he is not wasting money or gambling it away. It is their money and they both worked hard to earn it. Obviously, the book is audited only once a year. From what I have seen in my experience, I am not sure how many more checks and measures could be put into that process to make sure that my father-in-law does not take the money, only for it to then basically disappear, as I call it. That would be the case if mum was left in a home with no-one to look after her. It is an interesting issue. The office of the Public Trustee takes care of that process. In my experience, the books seem to get audited rather quickly, so I am very confident that the system is working well. However, I think it is an issue for us. It is important that the community as a whole and the government support seniors who are in that situation and need someone to have a power of attorney over them.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: During the estimates hearing for Western Australia Police yesterday, the police said that they do not record information by age of the victim, unless the age is relevant to the criminal offence. I know that the minister made the proposition that assaults are going down.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That is the information that I was provided with. It is a good point. The member asked that question and the police do not record the age of the victim.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: No. They were unable to give us any idea about the extent of elder abuse.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That is a good statement. I appreciate that feedback; thank you.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: I refer to item 92, "Contribution to the Western Australian Family Foundation Trust Account", in the table of appropriations, expenses and cash assets on page 623 of the *Budget Statements*. I ask this question because I know that there is a great project at Camp Kulin, which won one of the Premier's awards, that benefited from this trust. I wonder whether the minister can outline what programs this trust has assisted in the past year and perhaps explain the importance of this funding source to the community. I know that Camp Kulin, which is going from strength to strength, has been a huge boost to not only the community, but also lots of kids who are at risk in the city and are going out to the country. Assistance is vital. We have been assisting Camp Kulin in other ways. I am interested in this trust and how it works. Can the minister give me a bit of a rundown on that?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The Western Australian family fund, which is referred to in the office as WAFF, was established approximately 25 years ago with the objective of funding projects to support families and develop community values. In 2014–15, 20 projects across the state benefited from total funding of \$253 000. The important point to realise is that this is one-off funding; it cannot recur. It is designed to help out at Camp Kulin, in the member's case, which is a classic example. I am not sure of the details of what we did at Camp Kulin, but I am pretty sure that some infrastructure would have been provided or upgraded. It is a great project. It goes all over the state. In June last year I was in Lombadina and Djarindjin with Lockie Cooke and there was a half-court

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basketball court that had not been finished with a basketball hoop and stand. Through that account, we managed to give him \$5 000 to finish it off with line marking for a half-court basketball court, which went a long way in a small community. That is really good to see. There have been a number of other areas. Obviously, the WA Men's Shed Association conference was allocated \$500, as it needed some money to help kick it off. We have a group in the Shire of Derby–West Kimberley that helps girls in projects, which is really good. It basically has drop-in and sporting facilities, but it is mainly to allow young girls to go there to feel safe. It is a really good project that helps to support families. Of course, the hall in Shark Bay needed some mirrors for karate, so a small amount of \$4 000 helped finish off that project, which was ideal. An amount of \$5 000 was given to Alzheimer's Australia WA for the thirtieth annual conference, and \$50 000 was put into the elder abuse hotline. WAFF is a great little program. It is available to help support families through one-off funding.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: How often are grants made from this fund and what is the process? When Camp Kulin got this funding, I thought it was terrific, but I was not aware of it and I probably should have been. Can the minister explain it? I think everyone is probably interested.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Does the member mean that it did not get a letter from its local member to support its application?

Mr T.K. WALDRON: I cannot remember!

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: As I said, it has been going for 25 years. The process is that groups normally write to me, as the Minister for Community Services, because it is generally for a community-based project. As a former Minister for Sport and Recreation, the member will know that a lot of people write to ministers about little projects. The problem with a system such as that in the department of communities is that it has recurring funding and then it has to try to find money for other projects. WAFF was set up to support families in Western Australia. Basically, the application comes to the department of communities and then we assess it at the departmental level.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: Is it advertised or is it something that groups are made aware of through local government?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: If a group applies for money from the department of communities for a small community project that does not fit within a category, this trust is really good for that purpose, as long as it is not for recurring funding and it meets the criterion that it is to support families and the community. It is a great little one that has been going for over 25 years to help out those little backstops and to try to support our community as a whole.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I can see that it was also referred to in the previous budget. If it is a foundation trust account, who are the trustees?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: My apologies; it is not a trust. The Western Australian family fund is a discretionary fund.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: It says "trust account".

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Ray might be able to help me. I think the reason it is called a trust account is that it is held in trust. It is money that is put aside.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes; if it is held in trust, it is held in a trust account and it has trustees.

Mr R. Peters: At the end of the day, it is held in trust by the department. However, the minister has the discretion to oversee and approve the expenditure of those particular funds. Objectives and aims are linked to the trust account. As the minister said, it could be through requests through the minister or through the department and/or it could be the department making a request about a particular project for which we obviously see a community benefit. At the end of the day, it goes through a process whereby the director general and the minister, as the delegated authority, sign off on that.

[8.40 pm]

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: When was it established as a trust?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Twenty-five years ago.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: If it is a trust and it has that amount of money, it must have a core amount in it, which is the interest from it. Is that the case?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No, \$250 000 goes into the WAFF account each year and then it is held in trust for the department.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: If the government wanted to save money in the budget and keep the seniors safety and security rebate or the seniors cost-of-living rebate, it could have put that \$250 000 into it. It is not set up by law or it is not a requirement of the department to keep that trust.

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Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I think Mr Peters clearly stated that there are terms around how it can be applied for. There are quite clearly guidelines —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The minister could abolish that line item at any time. He could save the department \$250 000 a year by abolishing that line item.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I suppose it is like any line item in the budget. The answer would be yes.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: It is not established by anything other than it was established in the department. There is no legal establishment. It is not set down by regulation or statute.

By way of supplementary information, can the minister give me a list of the beneficiaries of the grant? Who was awarded money from this family foundation trust account for the past three years? Is it publicly available online?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No, it would not be online. I am happy, by way of supplementary information, to provide the member with a list of all the people who received money in the last three financial years.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes, that would be good.

[*Supplementary Information No A50.*]

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I have spent some time looking in the budget for anything that refers to women. I will just have to refer to page 623 of the *Budget Statements*, which shows that the total cost of services is \$110 622. I assume that somewhere in that the minister has allocated funds to support women in the community. In particular, I notice in the annual report that there is a concern about the gender pay gap, which is around 25 per cent in Western Australia. I notice that the “Filling the Pool” report came out recently, which mentioned the 25 per cent pay gap. Firstly, has the government abolished the Office of Women’s Policy; and, secondly, how many employees are allocated to working only on women’s policy issues in the organisation?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am not the Minister for Women’s Interests.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I know that.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I can give the member the information she asked for.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The minister already has it because he knew I was going to ask the question.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I did. It is the same question she asked last year.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: And I will ask it again next year. The pay gap will probably be just as bad.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is interesting that the “Filling the Pool” report identified those aged from 18 to 25, then they drop off through marriage and then it goes to the next level and, consequently, there is a pay gap. It is interesting reading. From my perspective, we have to find a way to keep women in the workforce. That is one of the issues.

I will give the member an update of what we have done in women’s interests. The state government recognises the opportunities and benefits of enhancing women’s interests by participating in Western Australia’s economy and community. Vehicles to advance women’s interest portfolio priority areas include: delivering a women’s consultative forum, co-hosted by the Premier and the Minister for Women’s Interests to engage corporate and community leaders in developing actions to address the issues impacting women’s workforce participation; developing the 2015 “Women’s Report Card” using data to present the status of Western Australian women across a range of key indicators in areas such as health, well-being, safety, work and education; and funding for community organisations and local governments to develop projects to strengthen the economic well-being of women’s access to leadership positions through women’s grants programs in 2014. Seventeen grants totalling \$71 656 have been awarded and there is provision for information and advice on a range of issues through women’s information services. Partnerships include Western Australian corporations, the non-for-profit sector and advances from the state government’s key priority areas of women and leadership and economic independence. I will pass over to the director general to answer the question relating to FTEs.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Before the minister passes over to the DG, I have a further question. Where is the report card?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will ask my director general to answer that question.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The minister just read out that he has produced it but there is no report.

Ms J. Mathews: The “Women’s Report Card” is certainly underway. As the member knows, that is produced every three years. The last one was produced in 2012. We are very much in the process of preparing the 2015 “Women’s Report Card” and expect that to be released around November this year. There is a lot of data to collect and we are doing that in a fairly rigorous way. We have set up a reference group of relevant state

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government agencies to gather the data across the key core areas that form part of the “Women’s Report Card”. We are confident that it will provide a very rigorous snapshot of how some of those benchmark indicators have trended over the last three years. Certainly, that is one of the priorities as part of the women’s portfolio.

To come back to the gender pay gap and our initiatives, there are a range of initiatives —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: My question was: how many FTEs are there?

Ms J. Mathews: The FTEs work on a range of different women’s initiatives. There are numerous initiatives, drawn primarily from the strategic research and initiatives branch, which sits within the community building and services division. There are 26 FTEs within the strategic research and initiatives area. Basically, we draw from that pool of people to complete priority projects for women as required. At any one time that can fluctuate. Part of my time is certainly devoted to the women’s interests portfolio. There are other resources within the office of director general, a good proportion of officers within the SRI branch and also the community funding unit as well because we provide quite a lot of grants as part of the women’s interests portfolio. It is a bit difficult, as with some of the other portfolios, to disaggregate the FTE data because at any one time a number of people might be working on women’s projects. They are working across portfolios so someone might be working on a project to do with the consultative forums but also working on volunteering, for example. We are very much encouraging and using an approach that works across portfolios, and women’s interests is part of that approach.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Has the minister abolished the Women’s Information Service or are there any staff or volunteers who work on the Women’s Information Service?

Ms J. Mathews: The Women’s Information Service certainly continues.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Is an FTE allocated to it?

Ms J. Mathews: Yes, there is.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Has the Women’s Information Service been co-located with the seniors service or is it a stand-alone service?

Ms J. Mathews: It is still a stand-alone service.

[8.50 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the first dot point on page 625 of the *Budget Statements*, which raises a number of issues regarding governance and also local governments’ asset and financial management. I refer to the government’s change in the budget when the WA Treasury Corporation wrote to local governments across the state advising that the government guarantee fee—the GFEE I think is the acronym—would increase for all new and existing loans to local government from 0.1 per cent to 0.7 per cent. Was the minister consulted about this additional imposition on local governments? Does he support it and is he aware that this impact could equate to several hundred thousand dollars a year additional expense to councils?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am very much aware of the increase—it was a cabinet decision. This will bring local government into line with all government trading enterprises. They are charged the same rate. It is still a very, very low rate. I take on board that the act of borrowing money has a cost involved but 0.07 per cent is still very cheap and it is a very good time to borrow money. It is a great opportunity. One of the issues for local government is that when they are building facilities for the community of today and tomorrow, maybe the ratepayers of today and tomorrow should pay for the use of that facility. It is a matter of achieving a good use of debt. I am very much aware that those costs will be transferred to ratepayers but they will be very low and in line with other government trading enterprises that have to pay the same rate.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister is aware that this will equate to several hundred thousands of dollars. Examples have been given to me by councils in the south west, in the Peel and other areas. Because the loans are retrospective—it does not apply to new loans, but existing loans—as some councils have struck their budgets, the cost will have to be passed on to sporting groups and recreational groups that have loans with councils through this provision. They will pay more each year on the arrangement they have with councils. I am interested in what the minister did to assess this before he agreed to it in cabinet. One council has told me that this could mean it will face up to one per cent or half a per cent rate increase. One council has highlighted its concern about a 0.25 per cent increase. Why did the minister not argue that at least it not be made retrospective but should apply only to new loans, because this is a big imposition. Does the minister know how much it will be in dollar terms for councils to absorb?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Local governments have access to these low interest loans from Treasury. I would like to have my mortgage at 0.25 per cent; that would be handy. The cost of borrowing money has never been cheaper than it is today. Even at 0.02 per cent, the cost of borrowing money is still very cheap. As I stated, it is about

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making sure we balance the books. The Department of Local Government makes sure that the amount of debt it can borrow measures up to the amount of its rate income. A limit on how much local governments can borrow has been set for quite a number of years. I understand the imposition on local government. As a cabinet minister, I also understand that in the current financial climate, I must take responsibility. When the state has lost \$3.5 billion in GST payments, and \$2.8 billion in royalties, in a \$26 billion budget, it is certainly hard to find the money. We cannot keep borrowing as a sector. I understand that. Half a per cent or one per cent will be a variation for local government. Obviously, as the local member for the City of Armadale and the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale, one with a \$100 million budget and one with a \$23 million budget, one per cent on both of those councils is a big variation on costs. One or two per cent can certainly have a bigger impact on a large local government, hence why the reform process will help with the capacity to repay and borrow.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have explained to the minister the impact that it seems the rate cap on rebates will have. This is another one that the minister's government has imposed.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Sorry, I have to stop the member. The cap on rates will have no impact on local governments; their income will not be affected at all.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is not what local governments are telling me. I assume that the minister is saying that this increase in government guarantee fees will not have any effect.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That will have an impact.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: On the same issue, has the minister's department done an analysis of the cost of streetlighting by local governments given the continued increases in electricity charges imposed by the government since 2008? Does his department have any figures he can present to us as either supplementary information or other that outlines the amount local governments have had to expend for the electricity charges associated with streetlighting since his government came to power in 2008? I hope the minister is not going to say there has been no effect from that either.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No; there has. I take that on board. I know that we do not have true cost recovery for streetlighting. The Minister for Energy has informed me that taxpayers' dollars are being used to fund streetlighting in WA. Cost recovery is a fair way away in funding that. A seven per cent increase in the cost of streetlighting in this year's budget will have an impact on local government, but it is connected to the local government index. That involves a process of how to increase costs while delivering services.

Ms J. Mathews: WALGA conducts an analysis around the components in developing the local government cost index. Utility costs are an element of that. We understand there has been a declining component of the local government cost index. I do not have the figures to hand, but WALGA collects some of that data as part of its local government cost index.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Further to that answer, who is doing the assessment on the local government index? Surely the department is having input.

Ms J. Mathews: It is WALGA.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The local government index has been around for a number of years.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The first dot point on page 625 reads —

Local governments are expected to meet high standards of governance and accountability ... The Department is working to build the capacity of local government councillors ... and undertake the required strategic and corporate planning, and asset and financial management ...

Surely the department has a role in looking at how the state government's determinations impact on costs for local government. What are some of the minister's officers doing? He has a division in his department for local government reform.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I did have!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am going to ask him about that division. I have a question about how his staff are tasked. I am not having a go at them; I know they work hard. I want to make sure that they are doing what they need to be doing to make sure local government is responsive to the twenty-first century. The minister has indicated it may be disbanded, but how many officers have been allocated to the division in his department that has been tasked with local government reform?

Ms J. Mathews: I will start with the resources allocated to metropolitan reform. They fluctuated depending on the stage of the reform process. I think it peaked about 2013–14 when up to 14 people were working on metropolitan local government reform.

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Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Are they FTEs?

[9.00 pm]

Ms J. Mathews: Yes. Of that number, around eight were in the metropolitan dedicated reform team. We also drew on other resources in other parts of the department. For example, FTEs were drawn from the Local Government Advisory Board, which played a key role in supporting the reform process. About five FTEs were supporting the Local Government Advisory Board. In addition to that there were a couple of other FTEs in the legislation and legal branch who were working on some of the legal-related aspects of reform. I guess at the peak there would have been around 14 or 15, but that number has since declined. It declined in 2014–15 to about half that amount, because the work subsided. Now, as a result of where we are at the moment, most of those staff are engaged in other activities.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I want to get to the cost of the failed local government reform process under the minister's tenure. What would be the approximate cost in staffing and resources to resource that division over the period of the failed process?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I do not think the word "failed" is a true description of what the reform process was trying to achieve.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The government did not get any amalgamations. There are still 30 councils in the metropolitan area.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Keep in mind that we used the Local Government Act and the Local Government Advisory Board. We did everything within the bounds of the act; we did not go out of our way to bring in any new legislation. We did not go through the legislative process as in Queensland and Victoria, using our power and numbers to force mergers.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No legislation on reform has passed this Parliament, has it? One bill is bogged down in the upper house, because the government failed to get the extra numbers.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That was after 25 hours of debate from the opposition side of this house holding it up. This could have actually helped the reform process, because we could have put extra people on the advisory board. But let us just leave that aside.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It was bogged down at the government's end because of the Liberal members who suddenly realised that the whole process was failing.

The CHAIRMAN: Let the minister answer, and then we will go to referral.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I reiterate that we used the Local Government Act. The Systemic Sustainability Study report clearly identified that the government would have to lead this process. We did not carry out any legislative process, and we made it clear that it was their act. I will explain the benefits that have come out of that process to get where we are today. The Robson report and the eighth Local Government Advisory Board report reiterated that the number of calls for local government restructuring have been endless. Local government and the community looked to the state government for some sort of leadership and support in this, and through the reform process we have been consistent in what we have tried to achieve. Since 2008–09, the state government has accomplished both structural reform and capacity building.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: How much has it cost?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am getting there, member; patience, "Grasshopper".

It was designed to build stronger and more sustainable local governments in a better shape to deliver the services. A total of \$28.8 million has been invested in local government capacity building and structural reform since 2009.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: And what has the minister got to show for it?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We have a lot to show for it. I would love to go through it for the member and show everything the government has done to make sure —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There are still 30 councils in the metropolitan area.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I understand that, but that was their choice.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There is one doughnut council over in Narrogin that might get up.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It will get up, member.

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I will just go through them to show what the government has done. A number of grants have been made to country local governments to help them build their capacity. Four regional councils have been formed through their zones and have come up with some really good modelling of finance, and this is building their capacity to deliver their services. Everyone in this room knows about the Robson report, which had 30 recommendations, but only one about metropolitan reform. The other 29 had to do with everything from waste management to popularly elected mayors.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: What has the minister done with waste?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member will have to ask the Minister for Environment about that.

The important thing to understand is that since that money has been spent, we have actually learnt a lot about the reform process and also we have built the capacity of local governments. I could talk about the \$1.7 million that I gave to local governments to help them with the reform process as well.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It was a great party, a great booze-up, but at the end of the day it was just a big headache for the minister—a \$28 million headache. Is the minister going to pay the local governments the \$5 million that they are claiming?

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Mandurah, let us hear the minister's answer.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We made it quite clear that the \$1.7 million we have given them —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is the minister going to pay them the \$5 million?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No, I am not. I will just make a couple of points. The Western Australian Local Government Association gave me a submission to say that the councils would like to be reimbursed for the money that they had spent. A couple of them said that they got no money from the state government, and were asking for \$40 000. One got \$100 000, and asked for a further \$40 000, and I felt like saying, "I have given you \$100 000 already, can I have my \$60 000 back?" A couple of them said that they never received anything.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister was spending money like a drunken sailor with the \$28 million.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That goes back to 2009, but in the case of the metropolitan reform, it is \$5 million; \$4.9 million has been spent on metropolitan reform. The majority of that was done through the Robson report. The \$28 million was from 2009, to build capacity. The government went out in 2009, before I was minister, to build regional capacity. In my time as Minister for Local Government, just under \$4.9 million has been spent on metropolitan reform, most of it under the Robson report. Of that, \$1.7 million was given to local government and the rest of it was used internally to pay for staffing for the reform process.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Can the minister give a final figure on what the staffing would have cost for that provision? It would have been a fair bit.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It was about \$3.2 million for the process of trying to deliver that outcome. I will come back to my original comment about the reform process. The best line that the Premier used was that the sector was incapable of reforming itself. When the opposition was in government, it had seven ministers for local government during its term, and it commissioned the SSS report, which identified that, of the 183 councils, 83 were unsustainable without some sort of a grant. The previous government sat on that report. Of those two metropolitan councils that I met going through a reform process, as I said at the start to the member, one was very happy and keen to go ahead, but the other one was more concerned about its own self-interest. Quite clearly, more than 50 per cent were keen to support a reform process.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Why did the government fail so badly?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I think Larry Graham's comment on the Wednesday after the announcement was "Show me somewhere in the world where people have voted for more government." That is what they did on that Saturday—they voted for more government, and that has never happened anywhere in the world. Looking at the three votes that succeeded, 47 per cent voted yes, and 49 per cent did not vote at all. For some reason the 47 per cent average on three votes succeeded. If a member came into this house after a general election and claimed to have won a seat with 47 per cent of the two-party preferred vote, he would not be here; he would be laughed out of the chamber. However, in local government, under what is called the poll provision, that is acceptable because a yes vote helps a no vote. If anyone wants to have an argument about a poll provision that is outdated, why it was put in there is beyond me. However, at the end of the day we stood by the Local Government Act; we worked through the act and the advisory board, and we stood by the outcome. From that process, we have all learnt a lot more about ourselves, but the sector as a whole still has to face its own worst enemies, and it still has not carried out any serious reform in Western Australia.

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Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: What is the way forward? The minister has already said that 80-odd councils are still unsustainable. They are not, in the Premier's words, capable of reforming themselves. What is the government going to do?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We have made it quite clear that it is a voluntary process, so if two local governments want to move a motion to amalgamate, I am very happy to support them and fund them through that process. Until that time, I do not think it will be up to me as minister or even the minister after me.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: He just throws his hands up in despair. He has given up.

[9.10 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister has given up!

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I do not think I have given up. I am fully supportive of a reform process, but the process to get to that reform is now in the hands of local government.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister has given up.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No, I did not say "given up". I am fully supportive of a reform process if two local governments want to come and talk to me. In the case of the Town of Narrogin and the Shire of Narrogin, they are working through that process quite nicely. I am happy to support them and get them to that next level. We are at the table. It is probably very similar to where the member is at for the local government reform process.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister has been savaged in the metropolitan area. Does the minister have any intention of implementing a reform process in regional WA?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Not unless it is similar to the situation in Narrogin. Both the shire and the town moved a motion to come together through boundary adjustments and submit that to the Local Government Advisory Board. I am happy to sign that report from the advisory board as long as two councils have moved a motion to support it. That is how the system now works.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I refer to the third dot point under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" about halfway down page 624, which states —

The number of Western Australians aged 60 years and over is expected to increase by more than 180% by 2050.

What is the government doing to support and encourage age-friendly communities in Western Australia?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: This is a great program we have put together with the Department of Local Government and Communities. We are working with our local governments to make sure we put in a bit of effort and time. The member started off his question with a reference to the ageing population. It is important to realise that one of the key issues for seniors is that people are living a lot longer, they are healthier and are far more in tune with life in general. For the member's information, when a person turns 100 years of age in Western Australia, their Seniors Card becomes a Gold Seniors Card. As long as a person receives a letter from the Queen or the Prime Minister, they receive a letter from me with a gold card in it. I normally give it to the local member to give to that person, which is fantastic. Last year I gave out 74 gold cards. Seventy-four people in Western Australia turned 100 years of age. It is a bit of a record. I think we will probably eclipse that number this year. Nineteen people had their hundredth birthday in November and December last year, so it was a busy couple of months. It shows that the population is living longer, and people are getting out and about far more often. One hundred years ago our life expectancy was about 65 to 70 years of age; now it is well into the 80s and 90s. It is important for us to get some strategic planning in place to ensure we have age-friendly communities. This could be as simple as working with the Minister for Planning to ensure we have a planning note around how we can do it, including what are called independent living units; the smaller ones closer to shops, doctors and transport. Seniors also undertake passive surveillance in subdivisions. Modern subdivisions are designed on boulevards overlooking parks, called cottage lots. Seniors tend to be home a bit more and have eyes on the street. It certainly helps in those new growing metropolitan suburbs. We have put in a lot of time and effort.

We are working on age-friendly communities with the building industry to make sure that new houses are built without the old-fashioned shower hobs and that floor drains are suited for wheelchair access over the next 20 years as people live longer. Modern designs allow that to happen. We are making doorframes wider than standard. The bathroom door is already wide to start with. We are looking into how we design and build. This is all about trying to make sure our community is age-friendly and ready for rollout. A number have already started. The City of Melville has been recognised by the World Health Organization as a leader in this area.

Since 2008, the Department of Local Government and Communities has invested more than \$500 000 to support local governments in planning for aged communities. The department has allocated a further \$100 000 for

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a second round of regional local government age-friendly community grants and funding projects in 2015–16. The department has provided Local Government Managers Australia with \$50 000 to deliver capacity-building reforms and an online network to support staff across the sector. Other significant investments have been a \$411 000 social innovation grant awarded to Alzheimer's Australia WA in 2014 to deliver dementia-friendly communities. The aim of the project is to make sure our seniors can continue to lead active lives in the community, but also to feel safe where they are.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister mentioned the grant given to Alzheimer's Australia WA. I asked a question this morning of the Minister for Health. I understand that in the Aboriginal community, the incidence of dementia is five times higher than it is in the general community. I asked the Minister for Health what he is doing in that regard and he said it was a matter for the commonwealth.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The department has been very supportive of Alzheimer's Australia through the social innovation grant. It has also received some other money over my time as minister to help out with designing houses. I went down to the member for Albany's electorate last August to open up a beautiful house called Hawthorn House. Money from Lotterywest contributed towards that. This is a really big issue for us. Alzheimer's is a debilitating disease. I have already spoken about my situation. My mother-in-law is now in a wheelchair and cannot walk or talk. She has been like that for two and a half years. Watching this slow process is not a nice thing at all. The only thing we can do is make sure we can support them in that. I take on board what the Minister for Health said. It is an issue for the federal government but it is also an issue for our state. As the Minister for Local Government; Seniors and Volunteering I am very supportive of Alzheimer's Australia. I have regular meetings with that organisation. We also work with it through this age-friendly community.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the line item "Seniors Cost of Living Rebate" on page 624 under the heading "Spending Changes". I really want to talk about the process of modifying and changing, and in some cases cutting, existing seniors' concessions and then raising the eligibility age for the Seniors Card next year. I want to get some idea of the process that the minister undertook to review seniors' concessions, particularly what consultation took place and what input the minister had. Was this a situation in which the amount the minister had to save was identified and he had to work backwards? Did Treasury basically have the running of it? Was any modelling done? How many seniors in Western Australia will be affected by these cuts?

[9.20 pm]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will clarify a couple of points. In this year's budget, no pensioner has any changes to their concessions at all. I want to make that quite clear. The changes that will come into effect include increasing the age. The eligibility age is currently 60. I think I can probably now call that the new 50. With an ageing population, the federal government is raising the age to receive the age pension six months every two years until 2035, when people will have to reach the age of 70 to access the age pension. We reviewed our Seniors Card. A lot of 60-year-olds are still working, so we took the obligation to maintain the age of 65 to receive the Seniors Card. Eligibility for the age pension will be raised to 66 in the next couple of years. We have taken the opportunity to raise that one year every two years to try to get into line where a Seniors Card should be. It has very little impact on the modelling we did around it. I will make this general comment: seniors are very proud people. There are 368 000 Seniors Card holders but only about 300 000 take up the cost-of-living rebate which is a cash payment from the state government. It is mainly to do with being proud. They are happy with their Seniors Card, they are happy with their free public transport, they are happy with their discount down at the shops and the other discounts they get. They do not always register, which is always interesting.

The important part relates to who we consult with. I meet quite regularly with the Association of Independent Retirees, Retirees WA, the Western Australian Council on the Ageing, and the National Seniors Association Ltd. There are a number of groups out there. I meet with a seniors group in my electorate on a regular basis. When we formed government in 2008, we introduced the Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council. People from COTA and National Seniors Australia and a raft of different groups take that up and report back to me on issues to do with seniors. We have taken up a number of challenges. I have had meetings with them to try to review the best way to support seniors. They have given me their recommendations to try to work out how we can best support seniors and have a good, robust card that is good to take us through for the next 20 years.

With regard to the cost-of-living rebate, that decision was made in the last financial year. The member may remember that we brought down our budget last year with the full payment, and the following week the federal government tore up the national partnership, so that is now reflected in this year's budget. There is \$20 million less in this year's budget, only because of the cost that we capped last year, but it was already set, so it is a basic catch-up.

Another area that we are keen to look at—the member for Mandurah has raised this—is the capping of local government rates and water rates. We want to make sure that the concession goes to the people who need it the

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most. More importantly, we need to keep in mind that one of the key things that we have done since coming to government is the grandcarers support scheme. We have made sure that we have topped that up. That is a great program to support grandparents who are full-time carers. They receive \$400 a year for the first child and \$250 a year for the second child. About 400 grandcarers are now receiving that money.

This year's budget also extends the free public transport concession for seniors. Public transport is now pretty much free for seniors 24/7, except for the morning and afternoon peak hour. A lot of my seniors are volunteers, and consequently they tend to be out after 6.00 pm or 7.00 pm; they do not tend to work the nine to five hours. They are the ones who said to me during National Volunteer Week how excited they are to be able to access free public transport after 7.00 pm when they have gone to a movie or something. Again, that is a good way to recognise seniors in our community.

Of course, next year we will kick in with the photo ID. This is one of the recommendations from my Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council. The council advised me that the discount that seniors get for a driver's licence was not reflected in the photo ID card. It was costing seniors \$44 to get a photo ID for five years, whereas for a driver's licence they were getting a 50 per cent discount if they had a Seniors Card and a 100 per cent discount if they had a pension card. So, a lot of my seniors were hanging onto their driver's licence. Australia Post sometimes demands some sort of photo ID for people who get medications through the mail, and if people do not have a passport or a current driver's licence, it makes it very difficult. The legislation for the photo ID card passed through this Parliament just over two years ago, and it has now been set up, and the same concession will now be provided as is provided for a driver's licence. I have been advised that a lot of seniors would give up their driver's licence if they could access another form of photo ID. So that is another concession that is coming in, along with the 15 that we have already.

Of course next year we will also investigate providing a rebate for seniors who wish to downsize. We are still working through how that will work. A few other states do this. Obviously it is not to do with the value of the property. It will probably be along the lines of the median house price and some sort of rebate on whatever the stamp duty for that would be. We can imagine that if someone went from a large empty-nester to a retirement village, the cost might well be the same. So we need to look at not only the value, but also the median price. That has been well received so far. We need to do some more work on that, and that is part of harvesting the savings out of those other two areas, and also bringing us in line with some of the other states. The important part is that the seniors in Western Australia are very well supported. The Western Australian Seniors Card is the most generous card in Australia. Members will not come across 15 concessions in any other state. Victoria has four concessions and New South Wales has about three concessions, so we are well and truly above them.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I was asking the minister about the process. It was clearly not the Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council that formulated what ultimately appeared in the budget. Did that originate from Treasury, because the minister will recall that the Treasurer announced that he was conducting a review? What role did the minister have and what role did the Treasurer have, and was it a question of having to find an identified amount of savings? How exactly did it occur?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The recommendations for the photo ID card came out of my Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council. It gave me a report and identified the things that needed to be addressed. It identified that the seniors safety security rebate had met its term. The problem with the security rebate is that seniors can apply for it only once, and consequently the graph was going down and down. In 2014, we changed it to the provision of personal security devices, and that took off with a big bang, but now eventually that has gone down as well because people can apply for it only once. They were recommendations to me from the Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council.

We also did a fair bit of work with regard to the capping of the rebate for local government rates. As I have stated to the member for Mandurah, some people were getting a \$4 000 or \$5 000 discount on their rates. A person could walk into their local government with a \$10 000 rate notice and pay only \$5 000 because they have a Seniors Card. I do not think that is what taxpayers' money is designed to do. It is designed to help everyone equally. What it boiled down to is the more expensive the property and the bigger the rate notice, the bigger the rebate that people got. We used the median rate notice, which is about \$1 200 in the City of Stirling, and, as I have explained to the member for Mandurah, we capped the rebate accordingly. We looked at all the options on the table. What that has done for us as a government is put a framework around how much these concessions should be. We are trying to estimate. We have just had a conversation about how rates are going up by five per cent, seven per cent or 10 per cent. Finance has to estimate how much money it needs to put into my budget for my concessions, and this year it is \$380 million. Finance then has to estimate what the increase in the rates will be and next year add to it. So, by putting a framework around it, at least now we can get some robust debate around how we can fund this in a sustainable way now and into the future.

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Ms M.M. QUIRK: Minister, what I am trying to get at is that certainly the Council on the Ageing Western Australia has been critical of the process and believes it was not adequately consulted. There is also the issue that the cuts are somewhat ad hoc. There was not a really good root-and-branch look at the system. There was an issue about means testing or other concessions that could have been revised and so on. Am I to understand that this is it and there will not be any other reviews for the time being?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: There will be no more reviews in my term as minister. I think we have achieved what we wanted to achieve with the card. We did consult with my Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council. After the budget, WACOSS came out and said this is a better outcome, because we are targeting concessions to where they are needed. I think the report of the member's committee, which was tabled last year, also identified that the state government's policy and framework needs to be targeted to where the concessions are needed. I think this is a classic example. We have consulted I think wide and far within the sector. The problem is that if we have a wide review, we end up taking, as I recall, days and months to get the review back in, because everyone has an opinion. The reality is that we need to come up with a good robust plan to support seniors in our community.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: So, minister, can seniors rest easy that the changes that will come in next year will be it for some time?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Most importantly, we will be looking to always see how we can support seniors in our community. The photo ID card is a classic example of how the world has moved on. We need to keep up with the changing world. The security rebate is a classic example of where we gave seniors a discount for security lights and security doors. We then changed it to personal devices, because people who live in a gated community or retirement village had those safety measures already, but they wanted personal devices. We are constantly moving with it. The important part is to make sure that we keep supporting seniors in our community.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister might need to provide this information as supplementary information. Can the minister provide the number of people who have taken up the rebate for personal alarms?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Prior to doing that, I will make a couple of comments. Since the inception of the safety and security rebate scheme, the Liberal–National government has provided over \$10.3 million to help WA seniors feel safe in their homes. The application of the scheme has slowed significantly, and the minister consulted the Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council regarding the rebate, and the view was that the scheme has served its purpose. The safety and security rebate will be discontinued from 30 June this year, and funding will be redirected to where it is needed. I am happy to provide the member with details of that \$10.3 million and how many applications were received. Is that what the member wants?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Is that for the safety and security rebate?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: No; just for personal security alarms.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No worries at all. I am happy to provide a supplementary answer for the member on how many applications for personal security devices—that is, the ones that people hang around their neck—were received and funded.

[*Supplementary Information No A51.*]

[9.30 pm]

Dr G.G. JACOBS: My question is about the opposite demographic—youth. I refer to the fifth dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 624 of the *Budget Statements*. Young people contribute to the community in a great way, but they also need some assistance and guidance. Some of those might be close to me, actually! Can the minister advise what programs are available through his portfolio to support the youth of Western Australia?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: This has been really exciting for me as the Minister for Youth. The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia does a fantastic job of supporting youth, as well as doing a raft of other measures in the wider community. One of the first things I did as Minister for Youth was to hold Youth Week in April 2013. It is held every year in April. On the Saturday night at the end of that week, we held the youth awards. It was a great event and we gave an award to a young man named Lewis Abdullah, an Aboriginal boy who works in corrective services. It was really good to see him achieve the status of youth of the year. I looked at Lewis and thought that it would be really good to send him to Halls Creek and Roebourne where there were some issues. That was one of the key issues. Last year we pushed back the youth awards to November. The reason for that is that a small number of people were applying for the youth awards, because they were advertised during January and February when most kids were on leave. Last year, we had 124 nominations in 24 categories, and 24 finalists

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went through. James Clarke from Lockridge Senior High School was named youth of the year, but this time I changed it and he is more of an ambassador. The prize he won was a return trip to Europe with Singapore Airlines, which is fantastic. I also worked very closely with YACWA to let him access \$10 000 to travel anywhere in the state so that he can be the ambassador for Western Australia. He wants to talk to schools and be involved in some youth groups throughout the state. He has become a true ambassador; he has something to do and feels as though he is part of that process.

A number of those programs are happening, which I am pretty excited about. We also have the cadets program, which is funded annually with \$3.6 million to provide opportunities for young people in secondary schools. How many new rangers have we set up, Ray?

Mr R. Peters: We have done a couple more this year in the identified areas of need.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: There was a commitment for six more River Rangers cadet programs in regional areas of Western Australia. It is a really good program to support youth; all ranger programs are. I think they are a great opportunity for kids. It relies on a school and very enthusiastic teachers to run that program. Money is available. A number of youth community grants are also happening in partnership with local government, and over \$260 000 has been allocated. Youth development services also provide sustainable structures and long-term youth development programs and activities for young people aged from 12 to 25 years, such as scouts, girl guides and the Duke of Edinburgh award, which is another great opportunity. The important point is that Western Australia is in a really good situation with its youth. We have a higher percentage of youth than in any other state. I think it is about 16 per cent, which is higher than in any other state in Australia.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: It is 16 per cent of what?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Sixteen per cent of the population is aged between 12 and 25 years, which is a greater percentage than in any other state in Australia. There is a great opportunity for the state, but it is also important to support them. Youth Week in April is always great, with a number of events happening throughout the state. Eighty-two or 84 local governments across the state took up the offer of \$1 000 from the department to provide some sort of activity for Youth Week. I thank the member for the question.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I refer to all the services and key efficiency indicators on pages 627, 628 and 629 of the *Budget Statements*, particularly the number of employees. In this year's budget papers, the full-time equivalents for 2013–14, 2014–15 and 2015–16 are 319, 306 and 302 respectively, but in the 2013–14 budget papers, there were 333 for 2013–14. According to this year's budget papers, there are 319, but according to last year's budget papers, there were 333, and in the 2014–15 budget papers, 297 are budgeted for. However, now around 306 are budgeted for. Firstly, are my figures right? Are they the numbers of FTEs in 2013–14, 2014–15 and 2015–16? Why is there a discrepancy between the number of full-time effective employees in last year's budget and the number in this year's budget?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I hand to my director general, Jennifer Mathews, to give information on the number of FTEs in the department.

Ms J. Mathews: Perhaps I will start with 2013–14. The member is correct; we started with 333 FTEs for 2013–14. That was then reduced to 297 FTEs, and that reduction in FTEs and in our salaries budget was a result of the restructuring that followed the merger of the two departments. An FTE reduction was associated with that restructuring. Basically, that was achieved through a range of voluntary redundancies. For 2014–15, the cap was 306 and that is the cap that we worked on. Essentially, the 306 reflected the new structure that we put in place. There are a couple of variations but they are really around the edges and they relate to funding that we received through the country local government fund for a couple of FTEs and also an FTE associated with the caravans legislation. A couple of adjustments have been made to that FTE number, but certainly for 2014–15, 306 is the correct figure.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Nine people were made redundant and then effectively nine new people were brought back onto the books as FTEs. What sort of loss did the department make by paying out people and then bringing them back into the agency?

Ms J. Mathews: Some of those staff were engaged on shorter term contracts to do a particular project, so they would have been achieved not through a voluntary redundancy, but just through the expiration of a contract. A case in point might be the person who was employed to do the caravans review, for example. Essentially, at the moment we have a fairly stable FTE number, and that reflects the current structure that we have. We expect that to remain reasonably stable. We have to factor in the adjustments under the workforce renewal policy going forward.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I gather that the 26 people in the strategic initiative branch the minister talked about before were in the delivery of community services, grants and resources area. I wonder whether the minister can

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provide by way of supplementary information a breakdown of the classifications of and the areas of employment for the 79 people in the service for the regulation and support of the child care sector; the 79 people in the service for the regulation and support of local government; the 16 people in the service for payments to individuals; the 106 people employed for the service of the delivery of community services, grants and resources; and the 22 people employed in the service for the promotion and support of the Office of Multicultural Interests. Is it possible to provide that by way of supplementary information?

[9.40 pm]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am happy to provide that.

Ms J. Mathews: We are going to provide information relating to the divisional breakdowns and their various classifications. Is that correct?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes.

Ms J. Mathews: Is there a particular focus on the community building and services division?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Yes, I would like the information to particularly focus on that area so I can understand how those people are classified, where they are working and what sort of projects they are working on but in those other areas as well, particularly the classification levels.

[*Supplementary Information No A52.*]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will have to pass to the director general because that went over my head.

Ms J. Mathews: Of those particular divisional classifications and levels, we will particularly focus on community building and services, but also those relating to the childcare area.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: All of them—every service area, which is 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. I would like the classifications and levels.

Ms J. Mathews: In relation to each of the four service areas.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: There are five service areas.

Ms J. Mathews: If we include the Office of Multicultural Interests, there are five service areas.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: I refer to the line item “Regional Community Childcare Development Fund” under “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies” on page 632 of the *Budget Statements*. Can the minister explain what the fund is and, in particular, what the allocation in this year’s budget will deliver to regional communities? I am interested in what is happening in country WA and want to know a bit more about the fund.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I had the great opportunity to be the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Child Protection. I licensed 1 045 childcare centres in Western Australia through the regulatory process. The regional community child care development fund invests in a range of initiatives to support the development and sustainability of regional communities managing education care services. The fund provides over \$9.3 million over five years from 2011–12 to 2015–16 from royalties for regions through local grants and regional planning activities. The regional children’s service plan has been endorsed and is being implemented in the great southern, the Kimberley, the Peel, the wheatbelt and the south west region. Plans for the Pilbara, midwest, Gascoyne and goldfields regions were approved on 30 May 2015. The fund promotes and enhances the sustainability of regional community-managed education and care services through a range of initiatives consisting of operations and strategic grants. A total of \$1 million will be allocated each year over the four years to provide assistance with operational expenses and support projects that contribute to the viability of the sector. Support will be provided for inclusive best practice for children with additional needs in eligible education and care services, totalling \$800 000 over four years. An amount of \$3 million will be provided over five years for mapping and analysing of trends and issues to develop regional children’s services and statewide plans. A total of \$915 000 will be allocated over five years for the sector’s leadership and change management. Also, \$536 000 will be allocated over five years for the program’s grant and administration. The fund promotes and enhances the sustainability of regional communities and manages the education care sector through a range of initiatives consisting of operations and strategic grants.

I think this goes a long way to ensuring that we have good, sustainable childcare and care services through the regional areas of Western Australia. Working through those regional children’s service plans in the great southern and Kimberley areas has been very, very good. We zoned them up and looked at their needs. With that money available, we can now start implementing those changes to ensure that we provide early care. One of the key issues is early childhood intervention at a very early age, which will start children off in school very well. If

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we can get them to school early enough, we are guaranteed to hold them at school so they can go on to further education. That is one of the key issues that we have been trying to develop in that process.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: The minister mentioned mapping of trends. Has that mapping started? I think that is pretty important as we go forward, along with how the money is spent. Is that underway?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, it is. A lot of stuff is happening. Our world is moving on. Fly in, fly out is a classic example of mapping and trending. That is something that is very different in our community now. A huge number of people fly in and fly out. Some children do not have a father at home permanently or a permanent father figure. We are trying to address that. That is one of the classic examples of that mapping and changing. We are also trying to put the services where they need to go, which is very important. Through those regional plans we identify how we can capture the people who live further away and ensure they get access to the services they need as well.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: That is good because it is really important for our country communities.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is very important. I thank the member for the question.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to “Youth Grants” on page 632 and also to the fifth dot point on page 624, which highlights the massive growth in the number of young people aged 12 to 25 years in Western Australia. They now comprise 16 per cent of the state’s regional population. The table on page 623 shows that a stagnant amount of money has been allocated to youth grants. I would like the minister to provide a breakdown of those grants by way of supplementary information. Do they include the cadet program or is that separate?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is separate.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Could the minister provide by way of supplementary information a breakdown of the youth grants as highlighted in that line item?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am going to provide the member with the current status of each of the youth activity grants. I have 12 on my paper. I will double-check that. Basically, it is a breakdown of that line item; that is, which grants are going out to what communities. The second question related to the cadet program.

[Supplementary Information No A53.]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I would like as supplementary information the total budgeted expenditure for the cadet program. I understand there are nine cadet categories. I would like to know the participation numbers for each of the nine cadet units by way of supplementary information.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am going to provide the overall number of cadets for each year. I am also going to provide a breakdown of the range of programs, the percentage who are involved and a breakdown by gender also.

[Supplementary Information No A54.]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have a more general question that relates to the whole funding of youth. The amount that we invest in the direct line item of youth in the local government and communities portfolio is not significant, and even in youth grants, there is no growth. Given that the government is highlighting in the fifth dot point on page 624 the substantial number of young people who make up our population of Western Australia, why is there no growth in the youth element of funding of the activities of the department?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: When the member says that there is no increase in funding, I think \$5.6 million is identified for youth in this year’s budget.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: To make it quick, could the minister simply outline by way of supplementary information where that \$5.6 million will be spent. Now as a general answer, are we seeing any growth in that area?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The department has invested \$5.6 million in programs, grants and funding services across a diverse range of projects and activities. I am going to provide a list of the projects and activities that have been funded out of that \$5.6 million.

[Supplementary Information No A55.]

[9.50 pm]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I defer to Mr Peters for information regarding trends on engaging with youth.

Mr R. Peters: Are we talking in general?

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Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am asking about the youth population increasing and the funding through the department for programs. It seems to be quite small compared to the number of young people now and into the future.

Mr R. Peters: In general, in terms of, I suppose, youth, as the focus and our general community services as part of the sustainable contracting with the non-government funding organisations, if you like, in 2011–12 there is a 15 per cent straight increase to all our contracted funded services, which included all the youth services. On top of that is part of component 2 of that initiative. There was a further five to 20 per cent increase. All our youth services got an additional minimum 10 per cent.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Are they contracted services?

Mr R. Peters: Absolutely. All our youth services got that additional funding. On top of that is part of the non-government human services sector indexation. They also get that every year. Obviously, we are focusing on youth, but in general there has been an average 30 per cent-plus funding increase, especially for our contracted funded services. That has been replicated in the years moving forward and is from our recurrent funding services. They are certainly keeping up with the increase required to provide those services and the increase in demand. We are still working with them, because at the end of the day we are also very clear in working with the sector, and we work with the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia, the Western Australian Council of Social Service, Linkwest and Volunteering WA to ensure the services we partner are really clear in providing a sustainable model. We do not want them to provide any more than they have to in the funding we agree with them on. In that respect, we are trying to provide what we can within our budget. We are also working with those sectors to make sure we are identifying innovation and enterprises within the service models. As I said, we are trying to keep up with them to listen to the community needs and are working with them to address those needs.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In the old days when I was youth minister we had a unit that I used to call the “department of youth”—I was an Alice Cooper fan!—but it was absorbed and it no longer exists. I am interested in the policy aspects in the department—the youth policy; the tracking of how young people engage with the community, education work, volunteering and all those things and whether it is an area that the department is still investing in. It is giving out grants, and funding agencies but is there still any policy aspect in the department to make sure our young people are well and truly supported as they grow into their adult lives?

Ms J. Mathews: Certainly across all portfolios there is a very strong emphasis on policy development, including in the youth portfolio, to ensure that policy development is aligned with the funding priorities and allocations. We certainly seek to achieve a good alignment between our policy development and where we direct our relevant funding, whether it is funded services, which Mr Peters spoke about, such as the \$1.8 million that goes to youth development services, and the allocation of grants that go out, including our youth-friendly grants to local government, National Youth Week grants and, of course, a huge component is Cadets WA. We work very closely. The policy work is conducted out of the strategic research and initiatives branch, which engages with key stakeholders on a regular basis such as YACWA. We work quite closely with YACWA, which, as part of the agreement we have with it, helps to inform us of trends within the community not just of numbers but also needs and issues. That has helped us, for example, direct funding into youth mentoring and into supporting local governments and the work they are doing around youth. That is certainly an important area for the department.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the first dot point relating to the whole function of local government, particularly planning. I know this is probably a planning question but given we have had a process for 18 months, I am interested in what sort of feedback local government has been feeding to the minister about the joint development assessment panel process, because I get mixed reactions about issues of local government losing planning responsibility. What is the minister’s feeling about or feedback on the JDAP process?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The DAP process set up a number of years ago is a good system and works well, especially in a small local government where conflicts of interest can arise when trying to make decisions. One thing local government does that is more important than anything else is set land use. The land use is commercial; it is retail. That is what councils are designed to do. When a person buys commercial land and applies to build, there are a few things to deal with such as setbacks, R-codes, colours, heights, widths and so forth. They are the criteria local governments have to work within, and, in dealing with them, emotion can kick in. There is a debate going on in my local government area right now about some land on a busy corner in Armadale where a person wants to have a smoke shop so he can sell smoking implements. A petition has been signed seeking to stop the City of Armadale from letting it open, but quite clearly the land is zoned for it, it is a commercial outlet, it is retail and it complies with the law. People cannot say that they just do not like the shop; the free world decides it. As the Minister for Local Government, I have not had any feedback about the JDAP process. It is a planning issue. There has been no feedback to me at all about it.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A — Wednesday, 10 June 2015]

p286b-316a

Mr Ian Britza; Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr Paul Miles; Ms Lisa Baker; Ms Janine Freeman;
Mr Terry Waldron; Mr Frank Alban; Dr Graham Jacobs; Ms Margaret Quirk

Planning is always the number one issue in local government that we struggle with. It is always the most controversial. There is debate going on about a fast food outlet in the member's electorate 200 metres away. I have seen the City of Mandurah design a district shopping centre that was designed to have a Coles bookend at each end, but Coles bought the lot and that has taken out the competition. Council can put a lot of forward planning into what is called good design and planning, but the free world will always decide. As the member will understand, one of the sheer frustrations is trying to get the person who owns a shop to tidy it up to make it look better. Councils can spend millions to upgrade the street, the footpath and the streetscape, but for the last 30 years a person will not have spent a cent on a coat of paint. That causes frustration for council. We cannot make them do it. In my hometown there are a lot of unsightly five-acre lots. A big no, no is sea containers. If someone wants to set up a sea container they have to apply for a development application, although it is not a permanent structure. The oldest trick in the book was to set up a couple of sea containers and erect a lean-to down the middle of them to create a shed, all without any approvals. Some have been turned into pseudo wrecking yards with 15 cars in them. That is an example of one of the sheer frustrations for councils. Planning comes up every time. Trying to get it right is hard and divides councils and communities. If someone wants to invest a number of dollars in building a large office or apartment block, it is great because it means jobs, employment and growth—everything we are trying to achieve. But if it takes two and a half years to get through the planning process, the money will get cold and they ain't going to build it and they will have lost an opportunity. We need good planning but we need to drive the process the right way.

I made a speech at the Western Australian Local Government Association annual general meeting last year about how government comes in over the top with the DAPs. Plans are sent to Main Roads and to the council, which has 60 days to deal with it, and it goes back to the DAP for a final decision. Why cannot local governments get together and come up with a better process that drives it this way? The City of Mandurah is very proactive in working with its developers. The council acknowledges that development is money and money comes from rates. People can walk in the door of a lot of local councils and hit a wall and spend months and months trying to get approvals on land that already had the approval.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. I am interrupting to say that we have concluded division 54.

The appropriation was recommended.

Committee adjourned at 10.00 pm
