

Division 14: Communities — Services 1 to 10, Child Protection; Women's Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services \$787 377 000 —

Mr I.C. Blayney, Chair.

Ms S.F. McGurk, Minister for Child Protection.

Mr G. Searle, Acting Director General.

Ms P. Beamish Burton, Director, Financial and Business Services.

Ms J. Dixon, Executive Director, Policy and Learning Development; Policy, Learning and Aboriginal Engagement.

Mr L. Carren, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr B. Jolly, Interim Executive Director, Regulation and Concessions.

Mr A. Geddes, Executive Director, Country Services.

Mr G. Mace, Acting Interim Assistant Director General, Child Protection.

Mr D. Settelmaier, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day.

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

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information she 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, 29 September 2017. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Nedlands.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I refer to page 127 of budget paper No 3, which is the first page under this division, and to the line item "Local Projects Local Jobs". Can the minister detail the projects funded under this line item?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Can I just clarify the page number?

Mr W.R. MARMION: It is page 127.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That page number is not in our division.

The CHAIR: Member, are you referring to the *Economic and Fiscal Outlook*?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes.

The CHAIR: It is not the detailed budget paper; it is in volume 3.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you.

Mr W.R. MARMION: On page 127, which is the very first page for the department, there is a list of a whole lot of major spending changes. Under "Election Commitments", the second dash point is "Local Projects Local Jobs". In 2017–18, an amount of \$1.8 million is assigned. Can the minister or someone in her team detail what projects are funded from that money?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, I would be happy to do that. Members present at these hearings would be aware of the Local Projects, Local Jobs commitment that was made during the election. A series of commitments were made by electorate. As the name implies, they were often quite local in nature, so they varied greatly and the amounts relating to them also varied greatly. I do not have a comprehensive list before me, but I can give some examples of some of the commitments that were given. I am looking at the member for Bunbury and the member for

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Balcatta—they had some commitments that have been funded. Since coming to office, the government has been able to release some of those funds to go to those community groups. It is true that some of them may have involved some unnaturally large corflute cheques that people handed over. That was the case when I was in the Pilbara recently, when the member for Pilbara was handing over some funds for some refurbishment works at a local women's refuge. Those funds were very much appreciated by that women's refuge in Karratha. As I said, I do not have a comprehensive list here. In 2017–18, the Department of Communities will support 53 of those projects at a cost of \$1.77 million—that is the \$1.8 million to which the member referred. In the previous year, 36 projects were attached to the separate line item.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Can the minister provide by way of supplementary information a list of those 53 projects for this financial year and the 36 for last year, and the amounts?

Ms S.F. McGURK: One of my concerns is that not all of those projects under Local Projects, Local Jobs fit within my portfolio. Some do. Obviously with the benefit of the machinery-of-government changes, under which three-plus large departments have come under the heading of the Department of Communities, the workload of Mr Searle has increased as a result. We have the same department but a number of different responsibilities under that one department. Even within these budget papers we have items attached to the former Housing Authority and the Disability Services Commission. What was part of the Department of Local Government and Communities—the Communities aspect—is contained in these budget papers, as is, of course, the former Department for Child Protection and Family Support. I can give some examples of some of the items under Local Projects, Local Jobs. In my electorate, details are still being finalised to ensure that the general promise made to a local group can be attached to a proper plan. For instance, we committed some money from the Local Projects, Local Jobs program to the Hilton Park Bowling Club, which does not have disability access in its toilet facilities. It is a really good little community centre. We have allocated some money, but we will not hand over that money until it has proper plans, three quotes and the like.

[9.10 am]

Mr W.R. MARMION: I understand that although the government has allocated \$1.8 million for the project, it may not get there because the department might bear down and find out one might be an incorporated body or have a disability. The amount of \$1.8 million is in the budget papers we are debating now. I just want a list of how the \$1.8 million is broken down by project. They may not eventuate, but I would like a simple list.

Ms S.F. McGURK: As I said, it might be possible to give examples of where that money has been spent so far and where it has been allocated, because the commitments that were made were sometimes quite broad in nature and we want to make sure that when we are handing over that money, it meets the needs. As I said in the example that I gave in my electorate, proper planning was done and quotes have been received for the item in question. It would be possible to get a list of those projects that have been announced—those that have already been handed over. I think a lot of those are probably in local papers and have already had some publicity. I would be happy to supply that list of projects that are limited to Local Projects, Local Jobs and under my portfolio.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Just to clarify, is the minister prepared to give a list of each project that has been announced, a figure and where it is? Does the minister have some other allocated money that she does not want to tell us where it is going because the government has not yet defined where it will be spent?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes; I am reluctant to give a complete list because in the end it might not be amounts that are finally handed over. If there is a detail or a question about the business case or quotes come in cheaper than what has been allocated, we will be happy to take those opportunities to save some money. I can give a list of those projects that have been announced by local members through the Local Projects, Local Jobs scheme. Some of those have been discussed in Parliament during question time; I know that the member pays keen interest to the dorothy dixers. In my portfolio, a number of members have committed money to women's refuges, community centres and the like. Those are the sorts of projects that have been announced. Some of them are road upgrades, so they do not fall into my portfolio.

Mr W.R. MARMION: If the minister could provide the list and if it has an unallocated section to make up the balance of \$1.8 million, I am happy with that. The government must have worked out a rough amount of money for the planning purposes to come up with \$1.8 million, but if the minister is reluctant to provide a portion of that money for some reason, whatever it is—it could be that the people do not know yet, I do not know—it would be handy if she identified the amount of money which she can say has yet to be announced or allocated via a supplementary.

The CHAIR: Are you happy with that, minister?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes. By way of supplementary information, we will supply a list of projects that have been publicly announced out of the allocation under the line item “Local Projects Local Jobs” on page 127 of budget paper No 3.

[*Supplementary Information No B22.*]

Mr J.E. McGRATH: My question relates to the third section on page 6 of budget paper No 3, *Economic and Fiscal Outlook*, and the minister’s agency’s involvement with the voluntary targeted separation scheme. Have any staff members been invited to express an interest in the voluntary targeted separation scheme; and, if so, in which areas of the department?

Ms S.F. McGURK: My understanding is that it has not been asked to participate in that particular scheme.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: What opportunities are likely to be made available for staff to apply for the VTSS?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Clearly, the budget was announced not that long ago; it has not been a month since the budget was announced. Management of those voluntary redundancies is something that the government takes very seriously and will proceed with carefully. We do not want frontline services to be affected by voluntary redundancies. That is particularly the case in child protection work because we have a large number of children in care and their safety and the management of their cases depends on stable and experienced staff. We will be managing that very carefully. At this stage we have not made general announcements to the department in the areas that I am responsible for about voluntary redundancies.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Given that the government’s target is 3 000 full-time equivalents, looking at the minister’s department, she obviously understands that some redundancies will need to be offered. How many staff does the minister think the department needs to make planning for if the government were to meet the general target that has been set by the Treasurer?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to Grahame Searle to elaborate, but I repeat that one of the big challenges, particularly in the child protection area, is that we have a large number of children in care and notifications coming before the department with a challenge to retain experienced staff with relationships with those families and communities affected. I signalled very early on after being sworn in as minister that I did not expect the areas that I was responsible for, as important as they are, to be immune from being affected by the management of the budget—the terrible budget that those on the member’s side left us with.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Oh, please; the minister is hurting me so much!

Ms S.F. McGURK: Clearly managing the budget and working within our means has been one of the commitments that we made during the election campaign. I said publicly after I was sworn in that I did not expect the areas that I was responsible for to be immune from that, but I would do everything I could to make sure that we managed it very carefully. That is certainly the case with these 3 000 redundancies. I will hand over to Grahame Searle, who will do much of this management himself.

Mr G. Searle: This is a matter that our corporate executive has started to discuss in depth about how we are going to approach this. Clearly, the machinery-of-government changes give us significant opportunity to streamline some of our processes and systems within the agencies. Things such as fleet management, accommodation management and even maintenance of buildings become very different when we put the Housing Authority in with a range of other service delivery agencies. We absolutely believe that there is some ability to participate in the scheme. The department has not been given a target for the number of severances we have to do, but we are putting in place an appropriate management regime to have a process for people to volunteer for the scheme and a management assessment process of whether the people are appropriate, to separate the issue of roles from people in how we do this. We believe that significant numbers will be leaving the department, but they will primarily be in corporate and administrative roles, certainly not in frontline roles where there is a definite need to continue to put feet on the ground.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Picking up from what the acting director general just said, one of the issues when we go into voluntary redundancies—I think this is where he was leading—is that some very good corporate executive people with a lot of history and knowledge about the department would probably get jobs easily in the private sector. They are the people who might put in for voluntary redundancies. I think the director general already alluded to this, but will some sort of process be in place to make sure that some of that corporate expertise is retained in the future?

[9.20 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Just before I hand over to Grahame Searle on that question, I appreciate his comment about machinery of government, because there are clear synergies to be made at the corporate level, and also some that we are starting to explore at the service delivery level, in regard to the cohort that some of our previously separate departments, such as the Housing Authority, and perhaps disability services and child protection, were dealing

with, so that we might be able to work more cooperatively across those portfolios on that challenging cohort. That is in the very early stages. I would imagine that, in the machinery-of-government process, if there are savings to be made in full-time equivalents, they will be in the corporate area. I will hand over to Grahame.

Mr G. Searle: I think there are two key things in this. The first is that it is a voluntary targeted separation scheme, so it is not just who puts their hand up first, and we will be taking that bit very seriously. The second bit about this scheme that is different from most is that the agencies will get to keep 20 per cent of the funding. One of the options we are discussing is putting the 20 per cent of funding that we get to keep into a graduate program, so that we can actually start the renewal process within the agency and change our skill base going forward, as part of this. I acknowledge absolutely the member's concern about the loss of corporate knowledge and seniority. It is a significant issue.

Mr D.R. MICHAEL: I refer to the fifth dot point on page 237 of budget paper No 2, which lists some of the election commitments the department has begun planning to implement, one of which is becoming a member of the Our Watch program. I am seeking some more information about the Our Watch program, and what the McGowan government is doing to stop violence against women from the start.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The election commitment to sign on to the national organisation Our Watch was one of the early commitments we were able to meet on coming into government. One of the others was having a dedicated minister, which was met when I was sworn in as the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. Western Australia was one of only two jurisdictions in the country that had not signed on to Our Watch. Initially, the commonwealth and Victoria had committed to a not-for-profit organisation called Our Watch, which was focused on mechanisms to prevent family violence. People have probably heard me speak about this in Parliament, and publicly whenever I can, but because we have a large number of family and domestic violence cases reported to our police and going through our courts, and a large number of people affected, a lot of our effort is going into making sure that women and children, as the victims of family violence, are safe, and concentrating on the justice system and the perpetrators.

However, we need to send a very clear message that violence is not acceptable, and family violence is not acceptable. One of the most effective advocates sending that message has been Rosie Batty, former Australian of the Year. She was in Perth recently, and every time she speaks, she comes across as a very passionate and effective communicator of the issues before us, partly born from her own tragedy, when her son was killed at the hands of his father. Some of the mechanisms that Our Watch is looking at in prevention include different methodologies in the way that we have adopted public health messages. I saw recently that statistics for smoking have dropped dramatically in Australia. They are now at about 10 or 12 per cent. Thirty years ago they were at about 50 per cent. This is an example of how, over a relatively short time, with concerted effort through public messaging, price mechanisms and the like, we have been able to reduce the number of people smoking. Similarly, when we get into a car, most of us reach over and pull on our seatbelt, although I saw last night that Delta Goodrem got into trouble for an ad in which she did not do so. It is not necessarily a public health message, but when we are walking along, most of us now do not just throw litter on the ground.

We could use different frameworks to help get the message out into the community that violence is not acceptable, and family violence is unacceptable. I am really determined to make sure that the state government leads that conversation in Western Australia. As I said, our rate of family violence is way too high, and it is entirely preventable. We really need to turn our attention to prevention work. There is no reason why we should not join in that effort with other states and the federal government to determine what works in behavioural and attitudinal change, and learn from those efforts. That is the point of signing on to Our Watch.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Can the minister outline what sort of programs or actions might come out of that that might work?

Ms S.F. McGURK: A program called Respectful Relationships is being rolled out in Victorian schools and has received a lot of publicity in some of the other states. Victoria has committed over \$20 million to Respectful Relationships from the very early school years through to year 12 as I understand. One of the elements of Respectful Relationships, in my understanding of the discussion, is not just a presentation given once or twice a term saying that domestic violence is bad, and this is what its effect is, but also a whole-of-school approach to change. It is one thing to say that domestic violence is unacceptable and should not be tolerated, but quite another to make sure that schools have somewhere for kids to go if they are being affected by domestic violence at home, or that other forms of violence are not tolerated on the sporting field or that generally women are respected in the community. Most analysis of domestic violence shows that one of the issues that we need to confront is a lack of respect for women in our society. If women were more highly regarded and more equal partners in a society, that would help address the violence issue. The program not only involves age-appropriate presentations to school students, but also looks at the whole school culture to ask how we can have more respectful relationships and that we deal with conflict in a mindful and respectful way and not resort to violence.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I understand that. I know that the schools program Protective Behaviours is a program similar to although not the same as that one, but all schools do not have to pick it up. Individual schools are required to adopt that program themselves and fund it through their supplementary funding. If the government picks up this particular initiative, will the minister liaise with the Minister for Education and Training to make sure that these programs run through all schools?

[9.30 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, absolutely. One of the frustrations is that we do not have \$20 million plus to roll out a program in our schools, but we have to be mindful that, as with all manner of ills, people would conveniently like to say that we will do some training of young people in schools and fix it up in the early years. That is true; we do have an opportunity to influence people when they are at school. That needs to be managed in the curriculum and the other work that is being done in our schools. That is very ably managed by the department and the Minister for Education and Training. But to answer the member's question, yes, of course, we will work with the department to determine how that is best managed with a quality delivery.

I think there is also a real opportunity and appetite in community groups and sporting organisations and the like to have this conversation. Since being sworn in as the minister, I have been really heartened to have conversations with the corporate sector, for instance, which is looking at equity issues and wants to increase the number of women at senior levels and throughout its organisations. It is interested to ask me what support it can provide victims of domestic violence and it wants to send a message that family violence is not acceptable. For instance, not long ago Rio Tinto announced that it will provide 10 days' paid leave for victims of family violence; that will affect 19 000 of their employees nationally and 11 000 in this state. In a very male-dominated workforce, it is a fantastic leadership position that says family violence is not acceptable. We are encouraging those conversations to be had in the corporate sector as well. Schools are important, but we cannot think only that we can give these difficult issues over to schools and that will solve all manner of social ills.

Mr W.R. MARMION: If the minister had a choice between the Protective Behaviours program and the Respectful Relationships program, which one would she see as the highest priority for children?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will not prioritise one of those over the other. Protective Behaviours is a very important message and awareness program that we need to implement through not only schools, but also our community. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is dealing with just that. How do we ensure that across our community, children are aware of their rights to be safe and to call out inappropriate behaviour? Importantly, children need to be aware that they all have a family and an extended community, whether through their school, sporting clubs, churches or community groups, that are keeping an eye on them. It will not be one or the other as far as I am concerned.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I can see synergies between the two, minister. Instead of rolling out one or the other, we could combine Respectful Relationships with Protective Behaviours and get synergies and savings. Perhaps the minister might like to consider that.

Ms S.F. McGURK: One of the policies that we took to the election under the banner of supporting communities is that we need to be evidence-based in our social policies. We need to try to assess the work being done in outcome terms and not only in output terms. To briefly digress, a good example of this was given to me when people were talking about the efforts that were applied after the earlier Closing the Gap report. There were very high smoking rates among Indigenous people nationally, so the initial contracts measured how many people went into these stop smoking courses. What should have been measured was how many people had stopped smoking three months later, six months later and two years later. Those organisations should have been paid for that and not how many came through the door. That is a simple example. We are committed to moving our tendering contracts to outcomes terms whenever possible. That is very much supported by the community sector.

The other benefit is that we could have the same outcomes whereby organisations receive money from various departments so they do not have to report in a different matrix. They can use the same formatting and that frees up resources for them. Outcomes measurement is not an exact science in human terms in social services. Another policy that we took to the election is to use our data better. We use data that is available—as we know occurs very well in the health field—in the social policies that we are enacting. How are our efforts going in some of these interventions? Is Protective Behaviours resulting in less abuse? Are people picking up inappropriate behaviour at an earlier time, for instance? They are examples.

Some of what the member is saying makes sense; synergies can be brought together. In my mind, in Respectful Relationships there are synergies to be made for teenagers and young people and how they are dealing with the amount of information that is available for them online—pornography, for instance—and how they deal with communicating explicit material through sexting and the like. There is a real connection between how we deal with that subject and how girls and women are viewed at school and family violence. There are definitely

links there. We need to be evidence based—I would not say too cautious—when we are changing programs, particularly when we are doing it at scale. We do not have a lot of money. We want to ensure that those interventions are credible and effective. We are doing quite a bit of work to assess what is going on in some of those programs in other states and other similar jurisdictions overseas.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I refer to service 3, “Earlier Intervention and Family Support Services”, on page 241. Can the minister please explain what the McGowan government is doing to prevent children from entering out-of-home care?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Early intervention and family support were a significant part of the previous Department for Child Protection and Family Support’s work. To date, successive governments have put a lot of effort into the tertiary end, if you like, when things with families are so bad that children have to be taken away under the statutory powers given to the department. There are all sorts of management and systems that go along with that. Unfortunately, demand on the tertiary side is showing no signs of abating and that is of huge concern. Some people ask whether that means we should take fewer children away from their parents. The answer is that the test for whether a child stays with their family is whether that child’s safety is compromised. The test is an effective assessment of that child or children’s safety. The idea of early intervention and family support is to ensure that some resources are put into the department to identify those families in which there are challenges for various reasons and providing proper support to those families earlier, before things get so bad that children have to be taken away. That was part of the general departmental reforms that were undertaken under the previous government.

In terms of significant reform within the department, I am not going to embark on any sort of change when I think that reform has been effective and built on sound rationale. The more I learnt about early intervention and family support—I was certainly aware of it before coming into office—the more it made a lot of sense, as it does even to the most casual observer, that we should make sure that we provide support when families are under stress to try to ensure that children can stay with their parents where they belong. Of course, that is enormously challenging because, as I said, there is high demand at the tertiary end. That is challenging work. I commend the departmental leadership in place before we came to office. The Department for Child Protection and Family Support brought Treasury in on conversations to make sure that there was a good understanding with other parts of government about the need to invest in early intervention. Not only are we not keeping children out of the system but also it is hugely expensive. We know that, shamefully for our community, child protection is one of the growth areas in government. We need to try to address the issues earlier in the pipeline. It is not dissimilar to the policy we took to the election called Target 120 to try to provide support before children go into the justice system and keep them out and get them functioning and addressing their issues, whether it be mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues, employment issues or past trauma. That will be money well spent because of the expense of sending children into out-of-home care—it is a very expensive system—but also, more importantly, wherever possible, children should be with their biological parents. That is where we would like to keep them whenever we can as long as they are safe. Dedicated resources have been allocated for early intervention and family support so that regional offices can work with identified families in which children are at risk of going into the out-of-home care system.

[9.40 am]

Mr W.R. MARMION: This is obviously a key area in the department. Can the minister identify a specific intervention that would occur once an at-risk family has been identified? The minister indicated that quite often issues arise and because the parents are not capable of managing, the grandparents might be. Does this program support grandparents playing a role prior to the need to remove children from the family? If more than one child is involved, does the department have a policy of trying to ensure that the siblings remain together rather than being split up?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes. I will not give specific examples but since being sworn in as minister I have been out to, I think, nine district offices. What first struck me at those district offices where all the staff would come together and politely meet the minister—more importantly, try to give me a picture of their work—was how many people were in the room. There would be 50 or 60 people in some of those district offices. There is a lot of work to do. In Armadale, for instance, the staff have care of something like 500 children in out-of-home care. In those cases, a decision had been made to take them into out-of-home care. They also gave me a profile of some of the cases they are dealing with. Essentially, the idea of that work is to link with other services. As I said, it might be mental health or drug and alcohol services. It will often involve families themselves identifying what they would like to do and what they think they need, to provide ongoing and often quite dedicated support to keep that family together. The department’s policy is very much to try to keep siblings together and to use extended family supports wherever possible. We rely enormously on grandcarers in our community. We have held bipartisan functions in Parliament at which we acknowledge the work of grandcarers who pick up when their children have not been able to care properly for their children. There are enormous challenges in that work because, essentially, once they come before the department, the families are already incredibly challenged. That is the work of the department. Under the previous department there were over two and a half thousand people and the supports that go with them to try to identify what a family needs to

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get on their feet and to address the issues that mean their children are not safe. I commend the work of those workers. I know that they often do it with a lot of heart and skill; I have seen that firsthand.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I note the budget item for early intervention and family support services for 2017–18 is about \$80 million and in the forward estimates —

Ms S.F. McGURK: What page is the member on?

Mr W.R. MARMION: It is the same page and refers to the question asked earlier. It is the third line item, “Earlier Intervention and Family Support Services”, on page 241 under the service summary. The budget allocation is \$86.48 million and in the forward estimates the figure is basically the same. I agree with the minister that this is an emerging problem and the more we delve into it, the more resources we will require. Let us say that about \$80 million every year is in the forward estimates, but there is no budgeted increase in the forward expenditure. I am interested in the minister’s comment. I think she might find she has to top that up. She will have to have a chat to Treasury at the end of this year and get some more money.

Ms S.F. McGURK: If the member looks at the previous item, in 2016–17 he will see a reduction in the amount under the previous government, and that was the conclusion of the responsible parenting service funded by fixed-term royalties for regions funding. I know in other parenting areas there were effective cuts under the previous government and that was frustrating and I do not think they got the attention they deserved. I think the public understands that if we provide families with the skills they themselves did not grow up with, they can provide a good life for their own children. Since taking on this role, I have been trying to educate myself about what happens when children undergo trauma and difficulty early on and about some of the possible interventions and some treatment.

I will answer the member’s question about there being no increase in real terms for that line item. We are acutely aware of that and frustrated by the budget situation that has been left to us when we are very limited in our ability to seek funding from Treasury for important innovations, solutions or investments that we could be making in the community services area. Of course, more money spent on early intervention makes good sense. As I said, we are very keen to work with Treasury and make sure that we underpin this work with good data analytics and good assessment to not only decide where those interventions are but also assess their effectiveness. I commend the work of the previous department in making sure that Treasury was brought along on the journey in some of this early intervention work. But, unfortunately, a lot of tertiary work needs to be done, given the number of children in out-of-home care. Those demands do not go away; we cannot leave those demands and reallocate resources.

[9.50 am]

Mr W.R. MARMION: The minister mentioned the reduction in our term, but the minister will find that the figures speak for themselves. There was \$85 million in the last budget for this item and, prior to that, the actual expenditure was \$87 million. I am not sure why the actual estimate for 2016–17—half of which was during this government’s term—dropped to \$75 million. There has been a \$10 million drop and it is going back up. I want it on the record that \$85 million was budgeted for last year.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am sure that the member is aware that, depending on whether the money is expended, if the department does not engage in the practice of spending furiously before the end of the financial year because some money in this particular item has not been used, some moneys will flow over. However, I can confirm that between 2017–18 and 2018–19, fixed-term royalties for regions funding for early intervention and family support decreased by \$4.384 million due to the conclusion of the Responsible Parenting program undertaken in six regional locations. It is frustrating that some of the distortions have occurred through RforR funding. I understand that people like to take the money—we will also be tempted by fixed-term funding—but when that funding comes to an end, people want it to continue.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I refer to the last dot point on page 237 of budget paper No 2, which states —

The barriers to women’s full participation in the workforce continue to be reflected in low levels of representation in senior leadership positions ...

Of the number of senior executive service positions removed by this government in the minister’s portfolios, how many have been occupied by women and how many by men?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am very aware of this issue in the changes that have occurred in senior executive service positions as a result of the machinery-of-government changes and the detrimental impact that has had on women in senior positions. I know that cabinet, too, is acutely aware of that and wants to make sure that it does what it can to reflect more equity at senior levels of government. Unfortunately, the machinery-of-government changes meant that 41 departments were reduced to 25 and there was going to be change. There was no way that we could have avoided that. In fact, that was the purpose. We had a ridiculously large number of departments in this state compared with that in other states that manage to get not only significant economies of scale, as Mr Searle was

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talking about previously, but also better outcomes in policy terms by having more cooperation between what were previously siloed departments. That can be no better illustrated than in the areas I have responsibility for. Across the room I see six local members who I am sure have been frustrated at times when the Department of Housing was dealing separately with child protection or disability services or Communities. It makes a lot of sense for us to be working more cooperatively. Of course, the next challenge is how to realise those efficiencies, particularly in policy terms.

Going back to the member's question, we are aware that in the first tranche of change as a result of the machinery-of-government changes, the reduction in SES positions reflects adversely on women, and we will do everything we can to correct that as we build a new leadership team through our government. A good example of that—I thought this might even be close to a dorothy dixer —

Mr J.E. McGRATH: It will be a dorothy dixer if the minister were to give me the numbers.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yesterday, we launched the OnBoard WA website, which provides any member of the public the opportunity to put forward their CV and express to the government what sorts of boards and committees they would be interested in sitting on. What happens now is that people are appointed to government boards or committees only if they know someone. If a majority of men are on those boards, often there is no equity on them, and even where there is a concentration of women, it is skewed into particular industries. OnBoard WA is a way of increasing diversity on government boards and committees, and I think it will be enthusiastically taken up by the public. So far the reaction has been very good.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Minister, it is very frustrating for us sitting on this side when you do not give us a figure. The question was: how many of the SES positions that were removed from the minister's portfolio were occupied by women and how many by men? We just need a statistic—how many men and how many women.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not have that information before me.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I find it very difficult to believe that the minister and her department do not have those figures for this important committee. These facts need to be put on the record, especially given her position—a position I support—and when she is quoted in an opinion piece in *The West Australian* as saying that she is going to do everything she can to increase the representation of women in senior positions. The opposition believes that a number of senior women in the minister's department have been dismissed. All we are asking for is—someone must have the answer—how many of the people who were dismissed are women and how many are men.

Ms S.F. McGURK: No women at a senior level have been dismissed from my department. I can say that categorically: no women have been dismissed.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: That is what the minister is saying. Have any men been dismissed?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is that in regard to SES positions?

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is that in terms of dismissals?

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Men who have left the department.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Dismissals, no.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: No-one has left the department?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No; I am saying that none have been dismissed.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I am now reframing the question: how many SES positions have become vacant as a result of people leaving those positions? How many of those people who left are women and how many are men? It is a plain statistic.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Mr Searle has given me a bit more detail so I will hand over to him to clarify.

Mr G. Searle: Speaking for this financial year, since I took over the department in an acting role on 1 July, only one SES officer has left, and that is a male. There has been one severance—I do not think he has walked out the door yet—and that is a male.

Mr W.R. MARMION: In the previous financial year, I refer specifically to Julianne Davis. Can the minister provide information on the reason she left? She was a very good government employee and probably someone valuable to the department. Can the minister provide information on how much it cost when Julianne Davis, the executive director of country services, resigned from the department?

[10.00 am]

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[Ms S.E. Winton took the chair.]

The CHAIR: Minister.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Nice to see you.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am not sure what I should call you, Madam Chair. Madam is a strange expression that we use.

I was just being asked about a specific staff member in a senior executive position, as I understand it. I do not have that person's details before me. In any case, I am reluctant to give details about an individual's employment cessation, but I certainly do not have them before me.

Mr W.R. MARMION: This is the budget estimates process. In terms of the cost to the Department of Communities, I am interested in getting the figure for the termination payment for that particular person, which is probably public information anyway. I am also interested in the figures for Amanda Gadsdon and Sandie Van Soelen. I would like to know the overall cost to the department of those three, very good women who left the senior executive service.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is it possible for that question to be put on notice so that we can then get the information together? I am conscious about supplementary information, because we have a short week next week. If it is possible to put that question on notice, I would be very happy to provide that detail if it is available.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: I am interested to know about that website that refers to women nominating for boards.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is called OnBoardWA and it will be used to increase diversity generally. It could be that in the member's electorate, any number of people are interested in different industries or fields. The website gives the capacity for people to indicate their general fields of interest in, for example, agriculture, mining or the community sector. They then upload their curriculum vitae onto the site and when we are filling positions, we will look through that pool. As I said, it has been very enthusiastically received because, to date, the way people get onto government boards and committees is through who they know; for example, it might be someone in the department, someone senior or a minister who knows them. Of course, that draws on a very narrow cohort. We want to extend that cohort because we know that there is a lot of talent in the state. The website is called OnBoardWA.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I refer to pages 236 and 237 in budget paper No 2. I note that the total of \$600 000 has been allocated over four years of the budget for developing the Target 120 program, which is —

... a scheme targeting the most prolific 120 juvenile offenders and their families to help turn lives around and reduce the rate of offending in the community.

Can the minister outline how this program will turn around the lives of the most prolific 120 juvenile offenders, given the funding amounts to \$5 000 per offender?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Target 120 was a policy that we took to the election. Going by my interaction with the public, when people heard about it, they thought that it was a very sensible idea. Chief Justice Wayne Martin captured this idea when he said in an address to a forum that it would be cheaper per year to send some of the young people who are currently in Banksia Hill Detention Centre to Scotch College. It would be cheaper because of the expense involved in having them in detention where the outcomes achieved are, in fact, very poor. Obviously, there need to be repercussions for poor behaviour and criminal behaviour; no-one denies that. The idea behind Target 120 is that if we are smart and use the resources that are available to us, particularly intelligence by local police and the local community, we can identify some of those young people who if they have not already been involved in the justice system, are very close to being involved in the justice system. If we do intensive work with those young people and their families, we might actually change their life trajectory so that it is not a revolving door in and out of the justice system that not only comes at great personal expense to that young person and their family, but also is an enormous financial impost on the state. As I said, when people asked me about this policy on the campaign trail leading up to the state election, they said that it made a lot of sense and, hopefully, we will be able to reduce the amount of offending while, at the same time, get better outcomes for those young people. That is the idea behind this program. In this budget we have invested money to make sure that we have a business case for that plan, and can start some work on data analytics. It goes to the point I was making before that a number of organisations in WA, and it is occurring apace in other states, are now saying that they have quite a bit of data available and if we use that in a smart and joined-up way, we can identify vulnerable or at-risk cohorts and we can then start to track those interventions to see whether they are effective. Treasury is starting some work on the data analytics to underpin that program, and it is in communication with a number of key stakeholders including, for instance, the Telethon Kids Institute.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Thank you, minister. Is the \$600 000 there to explore the data and develop the program? I know that the aim is to try to reduce the overall cost to government through other offenders' programs. Can the

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minister tell me what the time frame might be and what sort of program the department might have? The minister must have some idea of what it might be like, and some money will have to be allocated in the forward estimates for a future program.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, we made a very specific commitment not only on the policy but also to put dollars into this plan. The point about this early funding allocation is that a more fulsome budget will prepare us for the 2018–19 budget process.

Ms E. HAMILTON: I refer to the election commitments on page 236 and the line item “Male Perpetrators of Family and Domestic Violence Service”. Can the minister explain what the McGowan government is doing to provide safety and support in order to respond to women and children experiencing family and domestic violence?
[10.10 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: I thank the member for her interest in this area. I know that the member has been very active in one of the women’s refuges in or close to her electorate. In fact, it was the member for Joondalup who made a commitment under the Local Projects, Local Jobs funding to help with some upgrades that were needed for her local refuge. I know the member for Joondalup has had a good, supportive relationship with that refuge for some time. It strikes me that services relating to family and domestic violence have grown organically, if you like. There was a need for safe havens for women and children escaping violence, so a group of often women would get together, get a house, repurpose it, staff it and make sure it was secure. Some of the refuges I have been to have the same amount of commitment but are in the same building decades later. The challenge is to make sure we have fit-for-purpose facilities within a constrained fiscal environment. That is the refuges. We have to handle perpetrator interventions a lot better; an emerging body of work is being done around that. Of course, perpetrators should be held to account for their actions. Domestic and family violence is a criminal act that is now very clearly defined in legislation. It does not matter whether it happens with an intimate partner or in the family home, it is a criminal act and perpetrators will be held to account. However, unless someone receives a sentence of more than 12 months’ imprisonment, they are not eligible for specific behaviour change programs within prisons for overcoming their predilection for violence. The member would be aware that Communicare currently runs one residential facility in the metropolitan area called Breathing Space. It has been effective but it is only one program. It is a residential program that I hear very good things about, but it is the only program available for perpetrator intervention. Part of our election commitment to stop family and domestic violence was an acknowledgment that we need to do more when men have been convicted of an offence and there is an opportunity to get them to change their behaviour. I have also had feedback from families and women affected by family violence. They say that if the right intervention was available, they think the perpetrators could change. I make no judgement about that, but when people ask for help to change their behaviour, we should make sure that some services are available. Similar to other programs I have talked about this morning, we need to make sure that the funding allocation goes to programs and agencies that have demonstrated their effectiveness. We use the intelligence of those sorts of interventions in other places—states or countries—to inform what might be a good use of that money. We intend to invest in evidence-based programs and use all the smarter thinking about allocations to social change programs that I referred to this morning for perpetrator interventions. Quite a bit of research is being done at the moment, including at Curtin University, about the effective interventions, how they fare and the sort of change demonstrated over time.

Mr W.R. MARMION: On page 259 of budget paper No 2, I refer to the “Employee benefits” line item, which has a budget allocation of around \$660 million for 2017–18. With respect to the government’s wages policy of increasing remuneration by \$1 000 per employee, what will the average percentage increase in employee remuneration be at the Disability Services Commission over the forward estimates? The minister might not have it off the top of her head, but the director general might have it or the minister might provide it to me later.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am not the Minister for Disability Services, member. I think that division was covered off yesterday with the parliamentary secretary.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will reframe the question to include, basically, any employees under the minister’s portfolio for that line item. In relation to the wages policy of increasing remuneration by \$1 000 per employee, can the minister advise me of the average percentage increase in remuneration over the forward estimates; and is that reflected in the increases in that line item in the forward estimates, going from \$660 million to \$689 million, \$712 million and \$723 million?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am getting some advice on that, member. As to the “Employee benefits” line item that the member referred to, under note 57(a), these figures are not determined by the department; Treasury determines these figures based on the application of the government wages policy. I am advised that the \$1 000 wage increase has not yet been incorporated into those figures. I am being advised that in the *Government Mid-year Financial Projections Statement* the wage increase will be allocated to particular agencies. The enterprise bargaining

agreements have not been finalised for some of the areas I am responsible for. I assume that is one of the considerations in regard to that line item.

The CHAIR: Does the member for Nedlands have a further question?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes, just to clarify that. When the wages policy of a maximum \$1 000 increase is incorporated, I presume there will be a downward adjustment in those figures.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not think the member can assume it will be downward, but I think the first part of what the member said is correct—that is, that at the midyear review those increases will be incorporated into those specific line items.

The CHAIR: Does the member for Nedlands have a further question?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes, I have a further question. Will they be upwards? Will they go up or down, or stay the same? Have a guess.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I cannot say whether it will be up or down. I am sorry. I am advised that it has not been calculated.

Mr W.R. MARMION: The current figures must be based on something because Treasury has them in the budget. Are they based on a consumer price index of one, 1.5, zero, minus five? Does the minister have an idea? The amounts increase, so they must be based on a positive increase unless there are going to be increased numbers. I am sure the chief financial officer knows the answer to this question, minister.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am aware, although it is not my portfolio, that some of the increase contained in the budget is a result of the impact of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. I have just had pointed out that some of the detail the member is after will be available in the annual reports. The number of full-time equivalents is contained within the note on the page we are looking at, so they are detailed there across Communities.

[10.20 am]

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I refer to page 127 of budget paper No 3. Under “Election Commitments” is a commitment of about \$15.5 million for the line item “Remote Swimming Pools—Balgo and Kalumburu”. On what basis was the decision made to spend money on those swimming pools?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am sorry, member; I could address a number of items under those election commitments but that is not one of them. It is being managed under the Housing Authority portfolio. I believe that the minister may have answered a question without notice on those swimming pools at some time in the chamber.

Mr W.R. MARMION: It is a bit tricky to know which ones we can ask questions about under this regime. I was interested in finding out about the recurrent cost of running those pools. I am a big supporter of swimming pools in these regions. I have been to Balgo and I think it will be terrific to get a swimming pool there. Maybe the minister might like to make a comment about it without being too specific, because I understand that it is not her portfolio. One issue is the maintenance of any facility in these communities, with swimming pools being a little more complex to maintain. An amount of \$300 000 is allocated to maintenance in 2018–19, which is presumably funding for half a year. The amount of \$615 000 per annum probably seems about right. The director general might know the answer to this because it is his area. Will local Indigenous people at Balgo, for instance, be trained up to manage the pool, or will it be serviced by Department of Housing people? I know it is not the minister’s area, but I would like a comment on who will maintain that.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I understand the concerns about maintenance, but I do not have the detail, and I am reluctant to start answering questions about areas for which I do not have responsibility, even with the director general alongside me. I am sure that the Minister for Housing would be happy to provide any detail around those issues in response to a question on notice or a question without notice.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I refer to page 127 of budget paper No 3 and the allocation to financial counselling services of \$7.3 million over the period of the budget. How will this money be allocated; that is, how much will go towards administration, how much to staffing and how much to assist with bills?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I thank the member for the question, which highlights our commitment to financial counselling. If ever there was an example of every cloud having a silver lining, it was the publicity and attention that financial counselling received after the government that the member was a part of cut funding in the metropolitan area. Even the most casual observer could see that it made no sense. One good thing that occurred was that a lot of people who were not aware of financial counselling became aware of it. As the member pointed out, we made a commitment that we would reinstate the money cut from the metropolitan area. My understanding is that funds were not cut in the regional allocations to financial counselling. Another good thing that came out of the decision of the former government was that when the negotiations occurred after the money was cut, and then some of the money was reinstated, there was a reconfiguration of the management of those contracts in the metro area. There is now the Financial Counselling Network, which is managed by UnitingCare West and Anglicare. From what I have seen,

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they have been able to apply more modern methods to the training of staff, having common data, notifying people—they get a lot of no-shows for appointments—and those sorts of things. That has been positive.

To answer the question on how much of the extra money will be spent on frontline services and how much on administration, we have not commenced the process of allocating that money. We will have a small amount of money available for services between now and the end of this financial year. That is top-up money in that allocation. The remaining money will be built into a new contract that will take effect from the middle of next year. When that goes out to tender, we will be able to identify the breakdowns that the member described.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: The minister mentioned two service providers that will be involved initially. Are we led to believe that under this process, other service providers will be able to bid for funding?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is correct. Obviously, we have a contract in place that takes effect until June 2018. There is some residual money available for this financial year and then there will be a new tender arrangement with the higher base rate, or the complete package, available.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Will the allocation be made to separate locations—that is, to areas where there is more need—and, if so, on what basis will those allocations be made?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The department is working with stakeholders—those people who are operating in the industry—to see what is a fair way of allocating that money between now and the end of the financial year. It is not a large amount. We are towards the end of September now. We want to make sure that those funds are available on the ground where people need them. We will be transparent about that process and make sure that no-one is excluded from the opportunity to put up their hand and be considered for that allocation. One point that was made recently to me in writing by the member for Mirrabooka—I see that the member for Forrestfield is now in the chamber; he has also made this point repeatedly to me—is that when the previous government cut funds and reinstated some but not all of them, a good system was put in place in the Financial Counselling Network but there were some geographical gaps in the metropolitan area in terms of the areas covered. We want to make sure that those gaps are addressed in this reallocation. The director general has just reminded me that there will be some open consultation with the sector in early October about how we fund that small amount that is available for this financial year.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Will any of the energy or water utilities have access to any of this funding?

Ms S.F. McGURK: A distinction is made between funding for financial counselling and the hardship utility grant scheme. If the question is whether the utilities will have access to money for financial counselling, my answer is: not if I have anything to do with it.

Mr W.R. MARMION: The minister mentioned the two service providers and there is the middle manager of it. There is the client who seeks the services and the provider of the services. If I were an individual financial councillor and I wanted to provide those services, who would I go to and how would I be assessed as being qualified to provide those counselling services?

[10.30 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: At the moment it is a regulated system. A person cannot just say, “I am a financial counsellor”, and provide that service. They would not be given government funds to do that. The funds are allocated to providers that have been accredited. I am sorry, I do not know the correct accreditation, but it is an accredited system. Under the previous government, the funds were provided for the metropolitan area to the Financial Counselling Network and that network is managed by UnitingCare West and Anglicare. Then the individual financial counsellors are employed underneath that in a network. Similarly, I have every confidence that those financial councillors in the metropolitan and regional areas are all accredited staff.

Mr W.R. MARMION: The next issue then is that if we have a bunch of approved accredited financial counsellors, how does the department ensure that they are allocated in the right way? Is there a system in place or part of the contract, presumably, to make sure they are allocated in the right way so that the department does not get people ringing up saying, “Help, I haven’t got a job for two months”? Is there a system in place to cover that quite tricky procurement process?

Ms S.F. McGURK: When the previous government made the decision to cut the funds, one of the frustrations was some of the statements made by the then Minister for Child Protection, I think, that showed a lack of understanding of the work that financial counsellors do. People were angry at not only the cuts, but also the lack of understanding on the government’s part of what is done. People are triaged and prioritised on the work that has been done. I have met with some of those financial counsellors; in fact, my office in Fremantle sits alongside UnitingCare West local offices that employ a couple of financial counsellors. I have been in there to see the work that they do. They triage people, prioritise the cases and then work with them over time to not only meet their

immediate needs but also set them up on a stable footing to identify how they will have a more secure income and manage their finances in the future. It is not just that they will manage people for the next month or with the annual bills that are pressing in the next two weeks; they take the opportunity to do more fulsome planning. That is why it is such an important service, particularly when people ask for help. I think I pointed this out when I was asked a question about it in the Legislative Assembly. At the moment, the metropolitan services are telling us that in the last financial year they had to turn away 3 000 people who asked for help because they just did not have the resources. Someone knows that things are that bad that they are knocking on the door of a service provider and asking for help but the help is not there. Unemployment has increased and perhaps during boom times people overcommitted themselves. There are all sorts of considerations. We are trying to manage the demand so that when people want help, professional help is given to them that is enabling. It sets them up so that they have some success in the future of managing their own finances.

Mr W.R. MARMION: The question was not answered. It is in relation to the actual provider of the service. I understand what financial counsellors do, but how are they selected? Is there a list? Does an agency go down the list, give a person a job and once they have done the job, they go to the bottom of the list? Or does one provider not get a job and another gets five jobs because it is seen as a super-duper, really good operator? Is there a class A, B or C? It is about the procurement process on the appointment or selection of the financial counsellor. I do not expect the minister to know, because it is not her job to know that. I am just interested in how it is selected.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you. I do not know the answer to that, but I know that a lot of work has been done previously and now under the Financial Counsellors' Association of Western Australia, which is still operating, and the network to make sure that they have rigorous ongoing professional development for those people who are providing the counselling. I am confident that there is a quality-control mechanism for the services that are provided, but of course we rely on the department to assess that with the contracts and reporting mechanisms that go with expenditure of government grants.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I realise that. Can the minister just tell me how it is done?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The point has just been made to me that that is essentially managed by the contract managers, in this case UnitingCare West and Anglicare, but people access the services geographically. We referred earlier to some gaps in that geographical spread but there are offices available in areas of high need. That is an obvious consideration; people might not have cars or in some cases will not have the fare to get to some out-of-the-way place. We need to make sure that those offices are accessible in every sense of the word.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will explore it another way. Does the department get inquiries from people who are financial counsellors or prospective financial counsellors saying that they have difficulty getting a job to provide financial counselling?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, that is not my understanding of what occurs. Individual financial counsellors do not come peddling their wares to the department. We have a contract that is given now and, as I said, expires in the metropolitan area at the end of this financial year. Similarly, there are contracts for the regional areas.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I have the answer here; the minister said no, the department does not have people. That is all I need to know.

Mr D.R. MICHAEL: I refer to the top of page 241 under the heading "Service Summary" and the fourth service, "Working with Children Checks". Can the minister please explain how the working with children check unit is working to ensure children and young people are safe from abuse from those engaging in child-related work?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I thank the member for the question. The regime of working with children checks has been a very important development as we become increasingly aware of the need to ensure child safety at every opportunity. There are now requirements for jobs and employment opportunities in which working with children checks are mandated. We need to have a very rigorous system to process those effectively so that we identify any possible concerns or reasons someone should not be awarded a working with children check and in a timely way. If someone's employment is dependent on getting a working with children check, we need to ensure that the process is done rigorously and effectively but also in a timely way.

I have lots of notes prepared for me that I have read, without exception, but then trying to find them in my folder is another matter altogether, so the director general is earning his money today finding them for me; thank you. There is a screening unit now within the Department of Communities that was previously under the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. I have met with the senior management of that screening unit and talked through the processes. I was impressed by the rigour of the work and the attention to the task at hand. One of the points I will make about working with children checks, as important as they are, is that they are not a panacea for awareness about child safety. Someone, for instance, could get a child safety check even though there still might be some risks associated with them but they do not have a criminal record. If they have never had an adverse

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notification given against them, there is no reason for anyone to know that. The authorities do not know what goes on in someone's mind. The point for us as a government and as a society is to make clear that child safety is everyone's concern. In response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, that is something we take very seriously. We are looking at various layers throughout the state, whether they be government agencies, community organisations, sporting groups, schools, clubs or churches—wherever children are—so that we are aware that mechanisms are in place to ensure that children are kept safe. That is the first point.

The attention given to working with children checks worries me sometimes, because it can provide a false sense of security for the community—that people do not need to be aware of other considerations. Having said that, we work with the federal government and similar agencies in other states to make sure that we have rigorous systems, and that there is interstate communication of those systems, in the same way that we have recently legislated on domestic violence restraining orders in the Legislative Assembly, to make sure that an adverse finding in one state can immediately be notified to other states. I am satisfied that a rigorous process is in place. We need to keep those processes rigorous and thorough, and double-check the working with children check systems. The royal commission has done some work on working with children checks and has made recommendations that we are looking at. As I said, there is still a lot of work to do to raise awareness of everyone's responsibility to ensure child safety in our community.

[10.40 am]

Mr W.R. MARMION: This is a really important area. I am the former president of a hockey club and coach of a junior hockey team. Hockey is growing, and in our club the number of junior teams is going berserk at the moment, so getting parents to volunteer to coach, manage and all sorts of things, and finding someone else when a coach is away can be a problem. Our club has its own policy for having a working with children card, so I understand the issue and, from the point of view of a voluntary club, how difficult it is sometimes to go through that process. I am sure there are some cracks in the system across the whole state. Nevertheless, I am seeking some specific data. The minister obviously will not be able to provide it now, but she might be able to provide it by way of supplementary information. I am interested in finding out, for the years 2015–16 and 2016–17, how many working with children card applications were processed, the average processing time, the longest processing time for an application—that is important—and the number of staff employed by the working with children screening unit in each of the last two years. I would appreciate it if that data can be provided. I am sure someone has it in a spreadsheet there, but if not I am happy to take it as supplementary information.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am happy to provide that information. I have the 2015–16 figures in the Department for Child Protection and Family Support annual report. In that year, 123 555 applications were received, and 124 062 were finalised, including some applications made in the previous financial year. The number of cards issued in 2015–16 was 122 535, and 167 negative notices were issued. I know the member is asking about the number of employees, but I am just giving some of the figures that are available, or will be available in the annual reports. In 2016–17, 123 383 applications were received, 124 301 were finalised, 122 503 working with children cards were issued, and 157 negative notices were issued. Information for the time taken to finalise checks is also in the annual reports. I want to make sure that I have all the years correct, but in 2016–17, over 95 per cent of applications with no criminal record were completed within 30 days, and over 95 per cent of applications with a criminal record were completed within 60 days. I have just been advised of the current financial year full-time equivalents—44.8 FTEs were allocated to that unit. I have given the member figures over a few different years.

The CHAIR: Is there anything else that the member for Nedlands still requires?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I think that is a good thing to start on. I think that will be sufficient. If there is anything else, we can ask by putting a question on notice.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The figures will be in the previous annual reports, and in the forthcoming annual report. I know that the shadow Minister for Child Protection, who sits in the Legislative Council, frequently asks questions about this issue.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I have just one further follow-up question, and I know it is a tricky one. I have probably alluded to it in my previous questions. Can the minister confirm that no person is able to work with children until they have applied for and received a working with children card in Western Australia? This explores any gaps. Can the minister see any gaps in the whole system, in which people could work with children? I gave the minister a clue in referring to my hockey club, for instance. Does the minister have any concerns, and is she looking at ways to strengthen the policy of making sure that no-one can work with children without a card? Does the minister have any thoughts about making sure that this system is watertight?

Ms S.F. McGURK: My initial response to that is that it is one thing for us to have laws and regulations, but it is another for us to have control over what private and community employers do. We have control over the laws and

regulations, and our own employment practices as a government, large as we are, but we do not have control over what an employee will do when, for instance, they may be required to receive a working with children check, but they ignore that requirement, and we are not aware of it. In regard to the regulation, and whether that ensures that there are no gaps, it would mean someone who would be normally required to receive a working with children check and has not received one for various reasons—maybe just because of the time delay—is allowed to commence working. Gaps in the process are being identified, particularly in response to the work of the royal commission. As I said, a specific report from the royal commission related to working with children checks, to make sure that the system is as watertight as possible. I have just been advised that 36 specific recommendations relating to working with children checks were made in an interim report from the royal commission. I do not know what the member's experience was as a minister, but ministers get hit with lots of information and it is quite a challenge. I can walk and chew at the same time, but I cannot talk and read at the same time.

[10.50 am]

Mr W.R. MARMION: I used to defer to my department heads to answer the questions.

Ms S.F. McGURK: A number of specific recommendations came out of the royal commission to make sure that we have the most rigorous processes possible. We are looking very closely at those to see whether any improvement can be made. It is an offence under our legislation for people to work with children without having a valid working with children check.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I refer to the funding allocated to the Dalyellup family centre listed on page 236, which I am very happy about. Can the minister please explain why the services that the centre will provide are vital to emerging and growing communities such as those in my electorate of Bunbury?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have not been to Dalyellup, but I am looking forward to going there.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am very happy to take the minister there.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am genuine when I say that I acknowledge the work that the member for Bunbury has done not only since becoming elected but also in previous roles as an active person in his community to make sure that Bunbury has access to a voice in government and to the sorts of funds and facilities that are available for other communities. I thank the member for that work. This is an example of the member talking to that community and identifying a need. Before the election he advocated for a family centre in the area. Dalyellup has a growing number of families, but, unfortunately, does not have a central place, as many new communities do not. Traditionally, communities grow and there would be a shop and maybe a school and different sorts of central facilities where people come together, but with the way that modern suburbs and developments arise, sometimes they are retrofitted and a gap occurs.

We have talked this morning in these proceedings about the need for early intervention to stop people at risk being drawn into the child protection system or into the juvenile justice system, but our early intervention is best given when we can build on people coming together and connecting with each other. The family centre that the member for Bunbury is proposing in Dalyellup will be a fantastic example of that. Playgroups are a really good example of a relatively cheap—they are often free for families—facility where young families can come together. The primary caregiver, usually it is the mother, comes with their baby or toddler, and they do not have to know anyone there but they can just come in. The kids get to know other kids, which is really important for their development. Importantly, if the mother brings the kids, she gets to meet people who are in similar circumstances. I cannot tell the member how many of those conversations I have had with people at playgroups and community centres.

Providing a space where the community can then build and grow its own networks and communications and fill its own gaps in service provision is exactly what we need to do. That is why a family centre at Dalyellup will be really important. Sometimes we link up people in those centres with specific services, but, quite frankly, often people do not need services. Young mums and dads just need somewhere to go to get out of the house and meet someone else and make a social connection. I have seen those sorts of centres operate to great effect in Kununurra, Paraburdoo and Yangebup. It will be fantastic for us to meet our commitment to create a family centre in Dalyellup and let the community do what it does well. Let the kids grind a bit of food into the floor there and maybe draw on the walls if possible. It would be great to see a bit of life put into the new building.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is a lot of excitement down there about this project.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Getting back to the data side of the question asked by the member for Bunbury, I grew up in Bunbury, as the member knows, and this area in the south of Bunbury did not exist in my day. The funding is a \$1.5 million grant towards the family centre. Can the minister advise the capital cost of the family centre and whether the local authority or authorities have contributed any funds towards the centre? Has a business plan been produced that identifies the ongoing recurrent cost of maintaining the centre, and who is going to fund that?

Ms Simone McGurk; Mr David Michael; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr Donald Punch; Mr John McGrath; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Ms Emily Hamilton

Ms S.F. McGURK: I appreciate the question, member, because we are acutely aware that it is one thing to put bricks and mortar together and create a building and another to maintain it. I spoke about the need for a place where the community can come together and sometimes that can be at a very low cost, but, essentially, that building needs to be maintained and managed. We are having discussions, including with the local shire, and using the skills of the member for Bunbury to ensure that that will take place in Dalyellup.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Listen and learn.

Mr W.R. MARMION: He has skills!

Ms S.F. McGURK: He has skills. He worked for the Peel Development Commission —

Mr D.T. PUNCH: South West.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It was not Peel; he worked for the South West Development Commission. I will wash my mouth out!

Mr W.R. MARMION: He worked for the area to which this relates.

Ms S.F. McGURK: He has an understanding of the need to make sure that there is not only buy-in from the local community but also a commitment by the local council or other organisations to ensure that the centre is viable in an ongoing sense.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Can the minister get some advice from her advisers on the capital cost? If she does not have it, just say, “No, I do not have it.” Can the minister provide the information I asked for?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The allocation that has been made for the project is \$1.5 million and that will be towards capital.

Mr W.R. MARMION: The minister does not know it yet.

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, we have not done the detail of that work yet.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I refer to budget paper No 2, page 241, and the line item “Homelessness and Other Support Services”. I notice a significant reduction in the forward estimates from \$85.7 million in 2017–18 to \$53 million in the out years. I am wondering whether the minister can explain why this reduction is happening.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is an important observation. I do not mean to be trite and I do not know how much homelessness the member sees in his electorate, but I certainly see quite a lot, visibly, in my electorate. I know that as MPs we are all aware that there are many forms of homelessness that are not visible; people sleep in their cars or on the foreshore or couch surf and the like. These are really important services. My understanding is that this reduction in the forward estimates is a result of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness funding ceasing. The NPAH funding ceases in 2017–18 causing a reduction of \$15.42 million in expenditure in the forward years and over 2018. Essentially, it is the result of the decision of the federal government not to complete all its negotiations for homelessness funding. There was quite a lot of publicity about this earlier in the year. There was funding through the National Affordable Housing Agreement, NAHA, and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, NPAH, and now there is a new acronym just to confuse us all. But the bottom line is that although the federal government came through in the end with funding for homelessness services, it is in a different configuration and not all that funding has been forthcoming, although I think there is an expectation that there might be more in the pipeline. That explains that the \$15.42 million reduction in the forward estimates is due to commonwealth funding from the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness not being forthcoming at this stage.

[11.00 am]

Mr J.E. McGRATH: This has happened in other areas. I believe the federal government provided quite a significant amount of funding for Indigenous communities. It is sometimes something state governments have to live with. When the minister is in cabinet, will she push to get some sort of top-up through Treasury?

Ms S.F. McGURK: This, too, is an example of areas that fall between a few portfolios. Often Minister Tinley and I will discuss this because, essentially, he has responsibility for the bricks and mortar side of funding. However, child protection provides the services, so it is important we work closely and through the new Department of Communities, which is a great opportunity. To answer the member’s question, yes, we hope to continue to negotiate with the commonwealth so that there is no reduction in finances and services for all those organisations that do an amazing job without much. In fact, demand is increasing. I think the federal government also is aware of that. There has been concern that sometimes negotiations are taken up to the wire, and that creates a huge amount of uncertainty in the sector, which is already challenged with keeping people employed and the like, as occurred recently due to the NPAH uncertainty. I understand that we hope to have a new agreement with the federal government finalised and there will not be the gaps that are indicated in the forward estimates.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: It is interesting that the minister mentions the Department of Housing because, obviously, it is very much at the forefront of getting people on the waiting list into public housing. It is quite a significant list. What areas will the allocation the minister has listed under the community section mainly target? The funding would not go towards anything that Homeswest would be doing. Can the minister elaborate on what sort of areas of homelessness the funding will be targeted at?

Ms S.F. McGURK: A range of services are funded under the previous child protection portfolio. I could name any number of them in my electorate—St Patrick's Accommodation and Support Services is an example of one of the services. Ruah Community Services, St Vincent de Paul Society and St Bartholomew's House Inc are all funded via supports under that line item and in cooperation with the federal government through the agreements I discussed. Can I say that it is an area in which we have started to see some really impressive work being done in cooperation with service providers. Under Ruah's leadership, a project called 50 Lives 50 Homes was embarked on just 12 months ago and I think there are over 20 service providers under its banner. It is also partnering with the University of Western Australia's centre for social impact. The Catholic Church has put some money into it via St John of God Health Care. It has harnessed a formidable group. At the presentation I went to recently, one of the providers said they leave their logos at the door because they are not there to compete for funding but to work together. In just over 12 months of working together and targeting a cohort of some of the most disadvantaged homeless people—an index is used—they have housed over 70 people. They are working on providing appropriate housing and then appropriate support. It is fantastic to see that effort—cooperation across service providers between the community sector, not-for-profits and the like using research to underpin that work. The Department of Housing allocated 30 of the 50 homes, and two of the community sector housing providers also provided some of the bricks and mortar. Some good work is being done on that. I hope we can demonstrate the importance of that joined-up work and that the federal government will come to the party and ensure funding security in that sector.

Mr W.R. MARMION: The Premier comments about Nedlands being an affluent area, but, as the director general knows, there are quite a significant number of Homeswest people in Nedlands. There are homeless people as well. One person regularly comes into my office, usually on a two-year cycle. Here is a big plug for St Barts, which is where we usually send this person to. Will the reduction in funding have an impact on the viability of service providers such as St Barts? The item refers to homelessness and other support services. Under other support services, will funds go to the Aboriginal visitors centres in Derby and Kalgoorlie, which are two terrific centres? Are those two facilities funded under this item and are there any plans for the centre in Broome and further Aboriginal visitor centres to be provided throughout Western Australia?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We will do everything we can to make sure the federal government understands the importance of funding security in these areas. Frankly, I think it does. I think it understands that most of these services operate on very lean margins and to threaten or withdraw their funding will have a significant impact on some very vulnerable people. Having said that, I think longevity of funding contracts is important, albeit with rigorous funding contracts and the ability to acquit the funds and report et cetera. Our policy is to try to move to five-year contracts. That is an important security that should be given so that more security funding is available and it is under our control. That accommodation must be also culturally appropriate. One of the reasons for the success of 50 Lives 50 Homes is because each person has been triaged. A team has gone in and worked with people to ask: what is that you want and need? I am not sure whether it has been the case with all the people they have housed, but many have not opted for transitional housing. They have not said, "You've got some difficult behaviours perhaps as a result of mental health or drug and alcohol addiction; we'll put you into some transitional housing until you have settled down and then we'll move you to somewhere else." A point has been made that where possible they move people to where they will live. No-one responds well to uncertainty or to moving house, so it is good to get people into secure accommodation. In the case the member for Nedlands raised, culturally appropriate accommodation has much more chance of success than our telling people what they need from here in West Perth. That is the challenge we have in a number of social service areas. I should say that 50 Lives 50 Homes worked also with mental health providers. At Royal Perth Hospital, there are some homelessness services linking in with its emergency department. Not to stereotype, but many homeless people do not access primary health; they wait until they are incredibly ill and then go to the ED, where it is free. They are often sick enough to go to emergency, so they go there, get patched up and get sent out onto the street again until they are sick enough to warrant going back to ED. We need to break that cycle. In London, there is a project that addresses that ineffectiveness and expensive approach by making sure that when people go to ED, they use the opportunity to target them and try to link them with services. I am sorry that I cannot remember the surname of a doctor whom I have met and who has written opinion pieces in *The West Australian* on some very effective work she is doing to make sure that we understand what those people need and to provide them with a joined-up approach rather than leaving them to navigate their way through disparate services, because of course they do not navigate their way through those services.

[11.10 am]

Mr W.R. MARMION: I was after a yes or no answer on those support services for Aboriginal people. It may provide the minister an opportunity to elaborate on how good the Aboriginal visitor centres in Derby and Kalgoorlie are, but, without mentioning their names, I know that a lot of other towns want one. I am wondering whether the funding for that came from that item.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am being advised that some of the money for those two services—neither of which I have been to, but I have heard good things about them—came from that line item. Similarly, construction of an Aboriginal short-stay accommodation service in Broome is nearing completion, the design of which will ensure that it is culturally appropriate; the same methodology has been adopted.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I can explain the history around that. I opened both the Kalgoorlie and Derby services. It is worth *Hansard* reporting that—the director general knows this—there was a plan to locate one in Broome, but it took too long to find a site. The community in Kalgoorlie was initially opposed to a facility being built, so it was built on the outskirts of Boulder. I went there about four times before we opened it, and it is operating really well. The facility in Derby was built because the people in Broome could not agree where to put one. I went to lots of sites, but they did not want one built in the centre of town. The one in Derby was built very close to the centre of town, and it is actually in the best part of town now. Such an exceptional job was done that when the facility in Derby was finished and it was opened, which I attended, when the people from Broome saw it—I have to say, “Sorry, Broome!”—they thought it was fantastic. That is why Broome was keen to get one, and now everyone wants one. I think they will become an essential piece of infrastructure in remote towns or towns in which Aboriginal people living in remote communities come for somewhere to stay. That is something the new government should be supporting.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I take those points on board. The director general has just confirmed what the member has said, and Broome will shortly be opening its Aboriginal short-stay accommodation service.

Meeting suspended from 11.14 to 11.30 am

The CHAIR: Members, we will continue with the estimates. We are still on—and will be for the remainder of the session—division 14. I give the call to the member for Nedlands.

Mr W.R. MARMION: My question is a fairly simple one. I refer to page 260 of budget paper No 2. I can probably provide the answer, but it would be useful for the minister to provide the answer. My question relates to grants and subsidies. The grandcarer’s assistance respite program has an allocation of \$125 000. I know it is not much but it does not continue after this budget. Rather than me guessing why, I will ask the minister why that is not continuing in the forward estimates.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you, member. I am very sorry to confirm what the forward estimates indicates; that is, the allocation to the assistance program involves an annual payment to Wanslea Family Services to assist with the provision of respite, counselling, training workshops, support groups, home help and tutoring. That payment ceases at the end of this financial year. Grandcarers will continue to receive an annual amount of, I think, \$400 per annum for the first child and \$250 for each child thereafter. Western Australia is one of the few states that provides that support, as meagre as it is.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Can I confirm that that funding will not be rolled into the grandcarers support scheme, which is the next line item, that goes up by \$110 000? Can the minister clarify that Wanslea’s funding ceases and whether any respite funds will be available under the grandcarers support scheme?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No. My notes here say that the annual amounts will continue. As I said, it will be \$400 for the first child and \$250 per annum for each subsequent grandchild under the care of their grandparents. However, the support scheme will not continue. The increase in the amounts that the member referred to, which is about \$90 000, basically reflects the projected increase in the number of grandcarers participating in the scheme.

Ms E. HAMILTON: I refer to page 236 and the line item “Two Additional Women’s Refuges” under “Election Commitments”. Can the minister explain what the McGowan government is doing to provide safety and support in order to respond to women and children experiencing family and domestic violence?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I thank the member for that question. We have been very clear about our commitment to ensure that sufficient services are available for people escaping family and domestic violence. Unfortunately, it is often the case that people—usually women and children—who want to leave the family home and move to a refuge are confronted with space not being available. We need to make sure that there are refuges throughout the state. At times the refuge that people will decide to go to is not the one closest to where they live. It might be that the situation is so bad that people will elect to go to another area altogether to ensure anonymity and, therefore, safety.

In the lead-up to the election, we made a commitment to fund two new refuges—one in a regional area and one in the metropolitan area. After the budget is passed, we will begin the planning and decide on the exact location of those services.

An important factor is how the buildings will look. I have said that my observation has been that many refuges in operation have been services for over 30 years and are just not fit for purpose, with, for instance, shared facilities. Although people are appreciative of having a safe place to go and staff to assist them, it is good for them to have, for instance, a self-contained unit. Some of the newer facilities have security, but are also places where people can be alone with their kids and take a bit of time to recover from what are often very severe circumstances. We will make sure we get the planning right for those two new refuges, and we will be calling on one of the good service providers in this state to run those services.

As to the conversation we had before the break, unfortunately in 2015–16, 43 per cent of clients who sought assistance from specialist homelessness services reported family and domestic violence as the reason for that. We need to understand that a better response to family violence will hopefully take some of the pressure off homelessness services. That clearly links in with the conversation we had at the beginning of the earlier session this morning. It would be good to reduce the amount of family violence altogether and remove the need for these services. In the meantime, we need to make sure that there are places for people to go.

The CHAIR: Does the member for Nedlands have a further question?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I have a further question on the two additional women's refuges that the minister mentioned. I notice that the operational costs in the forward estimates will be \$3.3 million. Can the minister advise whether that funding is included in the line item "Preventing and Responding to Family and Domestic Violence" on page 241?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, that is right. That service provision is contained within that line item. The additional amount we have allocated to those refuges includes some money for bricks and mortar and some money to run the service.

[11.40 am]

Mr W.R. MARMION: I note the budget for that item for this year is about \$46 million and that it then drops off, even including the amounts in 2019–20 and 2020–21 for the two additional women's refuges. Is there any explanation for why there is a reduction in that line item in the forward estimates?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Again, this item has been impacted by the national partnership agreement discussions with the federal government to which I referred before. There is a decrease of \$1.056 million in commonwealth funding from the national partnership agreement on pay equity for eligible homelessness services. There is also a \$544 000 decrease in commonwealth funding due to a fixed-term family and domestic violence project funded under the national women's safety package initiative. Some of that is as a result of a delay in commonwealth funding for the National Partnership Agreement on Pay Equity for the Social and Community Services Sector and some of it was some discrete money that was given by the federal government for the women's safety package, which the government was appreciative of as it has been quite useful. Some of that has been spent, for instance, on the Safe at Home program, which has enabled women to stay in their family home. The South West Refuge provides this service; I see the member for Bunbury nodding. A risk assessment is done and, if possible, the women and children stay in their family home and a management plan is put in place. That is one thing that the federal government has part-funded through its Safe at Home program.

Mr W.R. MARMION: This is a fairly important policy issue. I had some experience in this area some decades ago and had discussions with the then director of child protection about a policy suggestion made by former member Norm Marlborough, which Richard Court acted on. I was the person who was asked to act on it to set up a men's refuge in Kwinana. That seemed to operate very well. Twelve men were taken out of their homes so that the mothers and kids could remain in their family homes and the kids could stay at school. The male moved out of the house. There was a Homeswest house with three bedrooms that had two bunks in each bedroom and they were full. Some support services were also provided. I had some difficulty in getting some funds from the department at the time, but I found some funds in the Premier's office to support that program. I understand that the program fell down some years later due to the person who was running it—that is what I have been told. I am interested in the minister's view on whether there could be a lot of savings if we set up men's refuges. That would mean that the mothers and kids could stay at home, because the perpetrator is usually the male. Has the minister looked at any sort of men's refuge solution?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I thank the member for that question. I really appreciate his interest in this issue. It is true that we need to look at more creative solutions to these problems. Part of the response to that is undertaken in the area

of perpetrator intervention. The latest thing is to not have a men's refuge but to have more effective interventions for perpetrators. It can be that with the help of restraining orders and, importantly, a risk management assessment, women and children can stay at home with various safeguards in place. That might go to the extent of including a safe place in that house, such as a safe room, and alarms and the like. I spoke to the women at the South West Refuge. I do not have the numbers in front of me, but my recollection is that they said that they had kept as many women and children at home through the Safe at Home program as had come through the door of that refuge. It is a significant and really important program. As the member said, why should the women and children have to leave when they have not done anything wrong? However, the priority has to be to keep people safe, so that is why they need to leave at times. Staying at home also keeps children connected with their own network, their school and the like, so there is a lot of merit in the general approach the member talked about. As I said, hopefully with the portfolio I have and attention on this issue, we can come up with more creative solutions to some of these issues. We need to learn from what other jurisdictions are doing and then apply the learning from those lessons here.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I had the opportunity to talk to the men at that men's refuge, for want of a better term. They recognised their problem or issue and they thought that it was good for their family that they were not in the house. From the experience I have had in this area, I find that it might be pretty hard to segregate the people in the house. It could be just the mental pressure of having someone still in the same house. I am interested to see how that works. Let us say that there was some conflict—I will use that word—between the parents. Perhaps the male is the aggressive one. I am not sure how that would work, just in terms of the mental pressure on the female from him being in the house.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Just so that I am clear, under the Safe at Home program, the male does not stay in the house. There is a restraining order; they are out of the house. The program means that the women and children stay in their family home with various safeguards put in place; they have an exit plan, a safety plan and alarms. It can be quite rigorous.

Mr W.R. MARMION: So the person is extricated from the environment. Fine.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I want to go back to a question I asked earlier about the last dot point on page 237 of budget paper No 2. We discussed the barriers to women's full participation in the workforce and the low levels of representation in senior leadership positions. The question I asked was: of the number of SES positions removed by this government in the minister's portfolios, how many had been occupied by women and how many by men? In response, when the minister referred the question to the director general, he said that only one person had left since 1 July and that it was a male. I have a response to a question asked in the upper house on Tuesday, 15 August, which asked on what date the tenure of Emma White, the former director general of Child Protection, terminated. The answer from the minister was 3 July 2017. We have a bit of a conflict here. Earlier we were told that only one person had left since 1 July, and that was a male. Now we have information supplied by the minister that said that Ms White's tenure terminated on 3 July. I think we need to correct that.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I thank the member for his attention to that point. I do not know whether the director general wants to make any comments about that.

Mr G. Searle: I do. In answer to the honourable member's question, my answer was that there was one severance package that I authorised as director general. Emma White's contract as director general was with the Public Sector Commissioner, so that decision was made directly between Ms White and the Public Sector Commissioner and I played no role in that at all. The answer I gave in terms of the ones I authorised was actually correct.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: The question now has to be rephrased. Of the people who have left who might have been dealt with by the Public Sector Commissioner or by the director general, how many have left; and, of those, how many are male and how many are female?

[11.50 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not have that information in front of me. I do not have any problem with providing that information. It is important to make the point that there were going to be reductions through the machinery-of-government changes. Making reductions was not the point of the machinery-of-government changes; one of the points was to provide efficiencies and a more effective joined-up service. That is needed nowhere more than in the areas for which I have ministerial responsibility. I make no apology for that. As a government, we have made it very clear that we want to make improvements to the number of women represented throughout the structures of the public service, not just at the bottom. Broadly, I think 75 per cent of public service figures are women, but at the senior levels that number reduces to around 30 per cent. We have to do better at encouraging more diversity generally, not just having a closed cohort, and tapping into the talent that is available to us. That is something that we are very much committed to.

Sometimes it galls me a little to have members opposite—not the member for South Perth, in particular, but as a party and as a government—point out the deficiencies on our side when we have made such enormous gains to improve the number of women in our Parliament. Fifteen members sitting on our side of the Legislative Assembly are women. The Liberal Party has two and the National Party has one. We have to do better. All parties need to step up. We have a responsibility to do that for not only our employment profile in government, but also our elected representatives. Sometimes that will mean that people have to step aside when they do not want to or we will have to put in place some very determined policies. If that is required in government, that is what we will do.

The CHAIR: Did the minister agree to provide the information that the member for South Perth requested in that question; and, if so, can the minister please clarify exactly what she will provide?

Ms S.F. McGURK: By way of supplementary information, I will provide the senior executive service positions whose incomes have ceased since the machinery-of-government changes.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: And what percentage were male and what percentage were female.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, that is right.

[*Supplementary Information No B23.*]

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Further to that question, I need to comment. I hear what the minister is saying in making a political statement, but she must understand that whenever these arguments about women's participation in senior positions in the workforce come up—the minister would have raised them in opposition—there have to be statistics to go with it. A person cannot just write a story and say, “There are not enough women in the workforce” unless they have statistics. We see them every time there is a story based on this subject. Women in Australia who hold key senior positions are itemised and that is why we are asking the question. I think it is important and we realise it is important. Women should have senior positions in the workforce, and I think we are working towards that. That is why we asked the question.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Just to clarify, the information that we will provide is within my portfolio remit.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I am not sure the minister will tell me this, but why did Emma White leave?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I answered a question from Hon Nick Goiran on this in the upper house. I am happy to repeat what I said to him. Essentially, those discussions were had with the Public Sector Commissioner, but Ms White informed me that she had made the decision, based on the changes that were occurring within the machinery of government, to take up the opportunity to study. She had a master's scholarship that had been sitting there for some time and was about to expire. It seemed that there was an opportunity for her to step out of the organisation that she had been in for some time to do that study. My recollection of the conversation I had with her is that she was not critical of the machinery-of-government changes; in fact, she thought that it was the right thing to do and that it would provide a more joined-up approach for very vulnerable members of the community whom she had been working with in various roles within child protection in particular. She basically told me that she had thought about it for some time since learning of the announcement about the changes to the machinery of government and decided that it was an opportunity for her to have a break, do some travel and complete some study. She will then reconsider her future from there.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I refer to the election commitments on page 236 of budget paper No 2. The gender specific line item “Male Perpetrators of Family and Domestic Violence Service” has been allocated \$200 000. I agree that it is an important issue. Noting the seriousness of this issue and the minister's government funding of two weeks' leave for victims of family and domestic violence, can the minister outline what the \$200 000 has been allocated for?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We previously discussed this issue and the work that is being done under this funding commitment and also by Communicare through its organisation Breathing Space. It runs a residential perpetrator program. We made a commitment to put more resources into interventions for male perpetrators for all the reasons we discussed through these proceedings. The money that has been allocated will go to planning and developing a perpetrator support model. It is important that we take the opportunity to look at what programs are available out there and to assess their effectiveness. We do not have a lot of money so we need to be careful about where we spend it. I assume there will be no argument about that. We are working with the department and the sector, which is very interested in this work as well, to get an idea about what interventions and programs are available, and the assessment of the effectiveness of those programs that are available. That money will go towards the planning and assessment.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I realise that; we did discuss this slightly before. Why is it just for male perpetrators? Males probably make up 95 per cent of perpetrators, but why is it not just called “perpetrators of family and domestic violence service” so that it is open to anyone who is a perpetrator?

Ms S.F. McGURK: When we refer to family and domestic violence, the issue about whether we should refer to the impact on women and children and whether we should refer to male perpetrators comes up quite a bit in my discussions, particularly online; it comes up on social media and the like. It is not only men who are perpetrators, but the vast majority of perpetrators are men. It is certainly not the case that only women are victims either. There are certainly males who are victims; often they are male children. The vast majority of perpetrators are male. The figure might be available to me in the papers; I am sure someone will give it to me by the time I have finished talking if it is here.

It is important to recognise that when we have programs, we are informed by evidence and we access the information that is available from what programs are applying in other jurisdictions and their effectiveness. The information that I have seen on that topic is that the perpetrator interventions that are necessary for men are of a particular type. They address issues of masculinity and are tailored to men. I have just been advised, and the point has been made, that counselling programs funded by the department are already available that deal with both male and female perpetrators. Relationships Australia and other organisations are funded to deal with perpetrators. What we are talking about here is a specific program for male perpetrators. When the vast majority of perpetrators are male, I think it is appropriate that we are clear about that.

[12 noon]

Mr W.R. MARMION: I was going to ask whether females would be excluded from the program, but I think the minister has answered that question. Other programs, such as Relationships Australia, will be picking up female perpetrators.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right, and I certainly make the point that violence from anyone is not acceptable. I want to make that clear—whether it is a male or female perpetrator, it is unacceptable. However, we need to take into account, as I said, that the vast majority of perpetrators currently are male. It might be that some of our interventions, if we want them to be effective, need to address that point.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will make a comment on that. I have some knowledge of this topic from people close to me. Although it can be said that the gender base might relate to the type of abuse, my understanding is that mental abuse might happen more from the female side. There are men in relationships in which the abuse is more of a mental, rather than a physical, nature. I am sure that the department is aware of that, and I am assuming that that sort of area is catered for.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I just make the point that there are new definitions. Probably the most up-to-date definitions were contained in the amendments to the restraining order system made by the previous government, of which the member for Nedlands was a member, and that expands the definition of family violence. None of that violence is acceptable, so I take that point.

Ms E. HAMILTON: I refer to the details of controlled grants and subsidies on page 260 of budget paper No 2, specifically the line item for women's grants. I note this item has a budget of \$85 000 per annum. Can the minister describe what some of this money was invested in during 2016–17?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I appreciate that question, and it is a little frustrating to me that the amount allocated to women's grants is so meagre. Unfortunately—call it a political statement or call it a statement of fact—we were left with an appalling budget situation, so we do not have additional money to put into important projects such as this. The women's grants program is administered by the Department of Communities. It was previously administered by the Department of Local Government and Communities.

I can give some examples of some of the funding that has been given out in 2016–17. About 25 grants were delivered over the year. All of them have merit; otherwise, they would not have been approved, but some grant applications were not approved, because we did not think they fitted the criteria. I do not assess them, but I see them once the recommendations have been made. An example is \$10 000 awarded for the Inspired Change project to deliver workshops for marginalised women, specifically those with young children, in Kwinana and Mandurah to give them resilience, self-sufficiency and economic independence. In the Kimberley, a similar amount was granted to enterprise learning projects to work with community groups to promote and facilitate entrepreneurship for women—realistic pathways to economic independence for Aboriginal women. The National Association of Women in Construction WA received \$10 000 to conduct its mentoring program for 2017. I went to its awards night last year; it is a very popular award program, and it is very important that we continue to do everything that we can to attract women into non-traditional areas. It is taking far too long to attract women into previously male-dominated areas such as construction. Dr Ann O'Neill is the founding member of an organisation called *angelhands*, which received \$10 000 to upskill women to deliver specialised trauma recovery services, offering them field experience and ongoing support, such as professional development. Finally, the International Forum for

Reconciliation and Peace received \$5 000 for a project working with multicultural women to help build their financial empowerment.

It is important that we get the message out that these grants are available, and we will do everything we can to widen their scope and ensure that people who may not have heard about the grants previously now know that the funds are available and are given the opportunity to put their hands up. Similarly to our OnBoard WA initiative, we want to widen the scope, so anyone with ideas will be able to put their hands up for these grant items.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: I refer to the line item for the regional community childcare development fund on page 260 of budget paper No 2. What is the regional community childcare development fund? I notice that nothing is projected or budgeted for this item after 2017–18.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The regional community childcare development fund has up until now been funded from royalties for regions. It is a project aimed at improving the availability and sustainability of community-managed childcare services in regional areas. Community-based child care is essentially not-for-profit childcare centres run by a parent management group similar to a P&C. There are a number of these throughout metropolitan and regional areas. That is what a community-based childcare organisation is, as distinct from a childcare centre that is run by a local government or by a for-profit organisation. There are other childcare centres that are also not for profit, but they are not community-based centres run by local parent groups. In many regional centres, just because of the number of people living there, it is hard to sustain a commercial operation providing child care. The purpose of this fund was to look at the viability of offering community-based childcare centres. I think the frustration has been that there have been two stages to this project. Stage 1 of the project is complete and was subject to an external evaluation, and stage 2 is currently underway. Knowing the importance of child care, it is frustrating that we cannot make it available wherever it is needed. Those are challenges that I know the member is well aware of in regional areas that do not have the same critical mass of people as particular towns. Even though people are living in those smaller areas, they still need those services. If parents want to work and they have children, they need child care. The purpose of the community childcare development fund operating in regional areas was to look at the viability of building up community centres in particular areas, and that project is now coming to an end.

[12.10 pm]

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Once it is finished, will any department take up the slack to assist or would it just be dead in the water?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am trying to refresh my memory on where this occurred. The point is not that the money was spent specifically on childcare delivery. It was spent on trying to create a community childcare organisation that would then continue under its own steam. The point of community-based child care is that it is not for profit and run by the local community through a parent group, usually, but it might pull in other professionals or other people who want to serve on the board. I am informed that stage 2, which is being funded, will fund revised governance models in the wheatbelt and the south west to improve the sustainability of those services in the region. The point was to get them up so they could be self-sustaining. Stage 2 had \$1.7 million over 2017–18.

It is really quite challenging in this exercise to read as I talk and sound coherent.

Mr W.R. MARMION: The minister can refer to the department's directors.

Ms S.F. McGURK: They have the same notes as I do.

There were two workstreams over two years, costing \$3 million, but the point is to try to ensure that there are self-sustaining community-based centres in those locations.

The CHAIR: I draw members' attention to the students of Maida Vale Primary School who are in the public gallery with us today with the member for Forrestfield. Hi, everyone.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Hello to the fine students of Maida Vale Primary School. Nice to see you.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: My question relates to page 248 of budget paper No 2 and service 10, "Delivery of Community Services, Grants and Resources". Can the minister explain the reduction in the number of full-time equivalent positions from 80 in 2016–17 to 57 in 2017–18?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There were some savings as a result of the agency expenditure review in 2016–17. The two programs most affected as a result of changes that occurred under the member's government were Best Start and Parenting WA. I was very critical of those decisions. They stopped providing services from December 2016 and those changes affected 51 permanent full-time and part-time employees. The programs ceased in December 2016 and the 2016–17 budget reflects the half-year impact with an approximate 22 FTE reduction.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Given that the minister was critical of it when she was in opposition, will she reverse what the previous government did now that Labor is in government? What will the impact be?

Ms Simone McGurk; Mr David Michael; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr Donald Punch; Mr John McGrath; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Ms Emily Hamilton

Ms S.F. McGURK: If only I could reverse those decisions. The money has been taken out of the budget and short of cutting other programs, we cannot reallocate money, as the member knows. That is why it is very frustrating, particularly in my portfolio, when I see really worthwhile programs or innovations that we are hamstrung from exploring because we do not have discretionary funds.

Under Parenting WA, people employed by the Department of Local Government and Communities ran a series of parenting programs in different locations. I have heard some criticism of the take-up of some of those programs and those criticisms may or may not have been valid, but I think to cut the program and the funds altogether was such a shame. As we have been discussing with early intervention and family support and providing good community facilities, the more support we can give families and people to have the tools to deal with conflict or difficulties in situ in their own families, the greater the likelihood of children staying with their parents and the less likelihood of things escalating. That is all commonsense. It is a real shame that we lost a lot of skilled workers. I asked questions about it and I tried to do my best to raise it as an issue. Unfortunately, sometimes the importance of prevention is a hard sell. People understand it is important, but when we are preventing a terrible situation happening, how can we demonstrate our success? That is one of our challenges in government. We need to make sure that we have the right metrics and data to show that if these interventions had not occurred, this would have been the trajectory of those families and when they have occurred, we have improved the situation. We are turning our minds to that.

One of the obvious points about the need for better parenting skills is articulated by advocates of the early years. People say, basically, from in utero through to when children are three or four years old, we have enormous opportunities to impact on an individual's life trajectory and particularly their cognitive, emotional, physical and behavioural development. When children experience trauma in those early years, it really holds them back in life. We want to assist parents when they are finding it difficult. Perhaps they were not parented well themselves. That is quite likely. If they do not have the skills or they have mental health problems or other challenges, drug and alcohol issues and the like, they will pass on those challenges across generations. Unfortunately, women working in refuges tell me that they are dealing with the children of women whom they first dealt with earlier. If we do not break the cycle, history is destined to repeat itself. The Telethon Kids Institute, the Minderoo Foundation and a number of other organisations make the point convincingly and forcefully that we need to ensure that there is investment in the early years.

I will not talk about it for too much longer, but I recently went to a presentation by the Women and Infants Research Foundation, which funds research into maternity issues and women's health. Professor John Newnham has just done a very significant study in Western Australia to try to reduce the rate of premature births. I was not aware, but premature babies are much more susceptible to developmental, physical and cognitive problems. We can assess whether a baby is going to be born prematurely by cervix length during pregnancy. Over the last couple of years, the centre conducted very simple assessments and then interventions, with training throughout the state, and it halved the number of premature births. That is a health budget matter, but we can do very simple interventions in utero to assist the life chances of children. Obviously, making sure that parents have good skills is important. The member has heard me wax on about that. We do not have the money to reinstate that funding to parenting programs but we need to invest more in the early years.

[12.20 pm]

Mr W.R. MARMION: I refer to the first two dot points on page 237 of budget paper No 2 concerning child protection services, a most difficult area. I feel sorry for anyone who has to look after that area. I know that the department has to manage a lot of cases. Are there cases that, for whatever reason, the department has to decline to take on; and, if so, what are they?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is the member talking about the first dot point on that page?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I am referring to the two dot points about child protection services and children entering care earlier and their complex behavioural problems. It refers in particular to Aboriginal children being mostly cared for by extended family members. Are there particular issues? I imagine there are not but I have been asked to ask this question.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am not aware of any cases in which, in this case the Department of Communities in its child protection work, throws up its hands and says that it cannot do anything for a child; in fact, it is quite the opposite. They are the people at the end of the pipeline who, wherever and however they can, make sure a child is safe and provided for. I might say that sometimes it is at very significant expense because some children have been severely damaged for some of the reasons we were talking about before, whether it is because of behavioural difficulties they have picked up in utero through foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, from very significant early trauma or from a disability of some sort. Whenever the department can, it makes sure it cares for those children in a family

environment. If it is an Aboriginal child, the Aboriginal child placement policy is the first port of call. They try to ensure that children can stay with their extended family but, if not, in the case of an Aboriginal child, with Aboriginal carers and the like. Thousands of foster carers throughout the state step up and do an absolutely incredible job. I know that there are times when we recognise that work but I do not think we recognise it enough. Sometimes, because of their needs, children are placed in group homes of various types. The department tries to provide the best services possible for those children. I am not aware of any children whose behaviour is such that they are not cared for by the department.

Mr W.R. MARMION: When I was Minister for Housing, I was taken through Roebourne by the lady running the regional office. She drove me up the street there and said that the problem was that a lot of children were out until 11 o'clock at night, but commented that they were safer on the street than in their homes. That disturbed me. Can the minister advise whether the situation in Roebourne has changed? Is it a hotspot and are there any solutions for those very difficult problem spots?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The issue in Roebourne has been a matter of some attention since the revelations contained within the police Operation Fledermaus, which has uncovered significant child abuse. I have to emphasise that this is not about just Roebourne; it is often a transient community and we could be talking about a number of areas throughout the West Pilbara where there are similar concerns. I do not think it is fair to talk just about Roebourne.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I gave it as an example.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right. On learning about Operation Fledermaus and prior to me being sworn in, the department had put resources on the ground to make sure that where child abuse was uncovered, adequate services were in place for children affected and their families. Where child abuse is suspected, services are made available and the department is being proactive on the ground for any people affected. That effort continues today and will continue into the future. In thinking about the work we need to do in the West Pilbara, I believe we need to ensure that there are immediate services to keep children safe. As I said, they need to be proactive and uncompromising to make sure children are safe. The next layer of work that needs to be done is that across governments and in partnership with the community sector, we have to provide much more effective services. There is quite a bit of debate about how much money is spent in a town like Roebourne. One school of thought says that Roebourne receives a much larger amount of money per capita and more services than a similar town receives. Another school of thought says that services in the Pilbara are really expensive, so per capita, it is not that much higher. But the conclusion is the same; that is, the services that are there, on the whole, are failing those children and their families in that community, so I think we would draw the same conclusion. We have to be a lot more effective—federal, state and local, particularly across state agencies—in providing for that community, not just for their safety, but also to make sure kids go to school, that they have good life expectations and that drug and alcohol issues are addressed in the town. A whole range of things need to be addressed.

Finally, another layer in that observation on my part—I have been to Roebourne only a couple of times—is that we need to work with leadership in the community to ensure that a positive expression of Aboriginal culture is recognised and celebrated. There needs to be an understanding that sometimes behaviours have been passed on from family to family and trauma and hurt has been passed on through generations. If we look at the issues in that way, we might start to uncover some healing, if you like, or improvements to people's lives in a fulsome way. I can give the member and the public every assurance that we are doing everything we can to make sure children are safe in that community.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Does the minister have any statewide data, or is it confidential—I can understand that it might be—highlighting the areas where we need to put in more resources for child protection?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The point I made in response to Operation Fledermaus becoming public was that if we learn anything from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, it is that we cannot assume that children's safety is compromised in any one location or any one community. In fact, as we indicated when we spoke about the working with children checks, it is the responsibility of us all to make sure child safety is paramount. Some of the cases that the royal commission looked at were not just historical. Some of the cases focused on very early in the work were current cases of churches or community groups where child safety had been very severely compromised.

I am not trying to avoid the question, but the issue we learn from seeing these very worrying concentrations of threats to child safety might be that we need to pay attention to elements in those areas if we want to resolve the issue. But if we think that child safety is compromised only in some areas, I think we are making a big mistake. I guess it is a long-winded way of saying, whether they are churches, community groups or schools, we need to be aware of some of those risks altogether. The department is continually looking at any of those trends and is

allocating resources appropriately to particular centres or any concentrations where we think child safety might be comprised.

[12.30 pm]

Mr W.R. MARMION: I am an engineer, and at the end of any discussion I like to see data, because decisions have to be based on data. We can start at the highest level. Can the minister provide the number of child protection cases that the department is dealing with? Going to the next level down, can that be broken up into macro regions? The next level down would go further. At what level can the minister provide statewide data so that we can get a bit of a feel, for example, about whether there are a lot of cases in the Kimberly or a lot of cases in the Pilbara? Can we go down to Fitzroy Crossing or Halls Creek? Surely that data is already available in the annual report. I am asking the minister for some data on this topic.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The 2015–16 annual report has just been handed to me, and the 2016–17 report is being finalised at the moment. The annual report contains the protection applications and orders by district. Child Protection has its districts—for example, Armadale, Cannington, East Kimberley, Fremantle—and the total numbers. That could be instructive. In those areas it is not broken down by head of population, but we can start to see differences across different areas. For instance, in domestic violence statistics, we know that in some areas —

Mr W.R. MARMION: Can that data be provided by supplementary information, please?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It will be available very soon when the 2016–17 annual report is released. The numbers for 2015–16 are available on the department website. I think the other figures have been —

Mr W.R. MARMION: Could they just be provided as supplementary information? If they exist, surely they can be provided.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The 2016–17 figures will be available. Yes; I am happy to provide the protection applications and orders lodged by district for 2016–17.

[*Supplementary Information No B24.*]

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I refer again to page 237 of budget paper No 2. I am still interested in the barriers to women's full participation in the workforce.

Ms S.F. McGURK: You are a new-age guy, aren't you!

Mr W.R. MARMION: He always has been!

Mr J.E. McGRATH: The final dot point refers to the low levels of representation in science, technology, engineering and maths occupations. What barriers are preventing women's participation in these occupations?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I genuinely appreciate the member's interest in this topic. I have been interested in this issue most of my working life. I will try to not talk too much about myself, but when I first left university, my first job was with the Department of Training and Workforce Development in a research unit that looked at women's participation in the workforce. That was 30 years ago this year. The statistics and the profile of women participating in traditionally male dominated areas, including the STEM areas, have not changed as significantly as they should have. In some of the graduate areas it has, but for women participating in the workforce and throughout the vertical layers of that workforce—for instance, at senior levels—it is still frustrating. The impact of that on STEM in the workplace has been that not enough women believe—this is either real or perceived—they have the opportunity to work in those industries, so they do not put themselves forward for, or think about training or working in, those areas. As a result, we are not drawing from our best and brightest; we are drawing from only half of them.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Does that mean they are not doing science or engineering at uni as much as males do?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes. I do not have in front of me the graduate numbers in science and engineering, but I think in some of those areas it is still not what it could be, and there is no reason for that. Certainly, in technology and IT areas, it is not what it could be. A national report that contained a WA component, which I helped launch recently, made the point that there is absolutely no reason that women should not be working in IT, but there is still that perception, or the lack of participation feeds on that—if people do not see other women working there, they do not think it is a possibility, so they do not go down that route. As a government, we have to meet that challenge. We have to encourage girls and women to move into those areas. That is a priority. The member knows we have an interest in diversifying the economy—hopefully, that is a bipartisan interest—and making sure that we skill up our workforce to meet the demands of that changing economy.

I also worked for more than 10 years in the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, which was then called the Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union. At that time, about two per cent of women were working in male-dominated trades, largely the metal trades, and things have not changed very much in any of those areas. Some men say to

me, “Some of that trade work is dirty. I’m not sure that girls would like it.” I am not sure whether they have seen what aged-care and childcare workers do, but I know what dirt I would rather be dealing with day in, day out. Some of the thinking has changed around what constitutes heavy work or safe work or appropriate work, but still there has been a slow lag. I suppose what I am saying is that it is a challenge. We want to do everything we can, from a government point of view, to send the message to girls and women that we want their skills in different industries; we want to help train them in those industries and help them to get jobs in those industries in Western Australia.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: While we are talking about personal experience, my interest in this stems from my daughter working in the construction industry. It is a tough industry for females.

Ms S.F. McGURK: What is her qualification?

Mr J.E. McGRATH: She went to uni and works in media. She works for a very big multinational company and is based in Sydney, but it is a hard game. It is very competitive out there.

The dot point at the bottom of page 37 also states —

The gender pay gap in Western Australia is larger than the national average, ...

Does the minister have any figures on that?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The current figure for the gender pay gap in WA is 24 per cent. The average pay for women is 24 per cent less than the average pay for men, which is high. Nationally, it is about 16 per cent. For over 25 years Western Australia has had a persistently high pay gap at about that level, between eight and 10 per cent higher than the national average, and the national average is high, at around 16 per cent. The reasons for that are that women tend to be concentrated in certain industries that attract lower pay—that is, the care industries on the whole, and also some areas of education and health—and that, traditionally, the skills associated with women’s work, if you like, have not been as well recognised as some traditionally male dominated work. For instance, caring responsibilities and educating responsibilities have not been as highly valued in our community as other technical skills. Yet if we think about it, when people drop off their children to child care, they want people working in that area to be skilled and attentive and on their game. Unfortunately, workers in that area are some of the lowest paid workers.

[12.40 pm]

Mr J.E. McGRATH: If we got more women into the science, technology, engineering and mathematical occupations, that percentage would go up and that pay gap would decrease because they would be getting into the higher-paid brackets. That is what we have to aim for, obviously.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Exactly. That is a very big part of our efforts, which is to also properly recognise the skills associated with traditionally female work; that is another thing that needs to happen in the childcare industry, for instance. When I represented workers, I went from working in the metalworkers’ union to working with childcare workers. It was a really interesting contrast in the lower expectations of how those workers should be remunerated. Across the industry there has been an effort by not only unions, but also the early childhood education sector to try to professionalise that industry. They are not just babysitters. I think a federal senator said that they were just wiping kids’ noses and trying to stop them from killing each other. However, those workers are often doing structured training and running structured play. In the case of child care, we need an increased recognition of the professional skills that those workers apply. Of course, there is tension in that space because there is not a lot of capacity to pay, unlike in the mining and resource sectors that are associated with a lot of money. In early childhood education, for instance, more money for those workers ultimately needs to be paid by the families or the government; there is a huge tension there.

In order to address the pay gap, we will have to do a range of things that go from, importantly, attracting women into STEM occupations for a whole lot of reasons, to addressing the pay gap because we do not want to be drawing on half of our talent and our population. We want to be drawing on the best and brightest; it does not matter what sex they are or from what walk of life they come. We also have to look at the career path of people. For instance, more women are now graduating from law, but fewer women become senior counsels, partners in law firms, barristers and then magistrates and judges.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: There are quite a few judges.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, but a report is done every three years by the department that shows that the legal profession is still wanting in terms of women moving up that career path, because women, largely, but not only, take time out to have families, which we need to recognise. As I said, this is not just an altruistic move. This is being done because we want to train and retain talent in our economy. This is not just the right to thing to do; it is the smart thing to.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I have observed that the minister’s male advisers outnumber the females by three to one.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, that is the nature of our workforce. I can assure the member that there is plenty of talent in the departments for which I am responsible. I take the member's point. We all have to recognise that we have to do a lot more to encourage women throughout their career path, whether it is across the chamber, in departments or wherever.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I am interested in this as well. My aunty—my only aunty, in fact—graduated from the University of Western Australia with a science degree in the 1940s. She wrote the academic chapter in the 1985 book with a foreword by Senator Ryan. She got a scholarship to go to the University of Oxford and she ended up being a foundation member of *Choice*, and the secretary of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science. While she was at UWA, I think she was secretary of the UWA Student Guild rather than guild president, because, unfortunately, that was the role for girls. She instilled in me a lot of feminist attributes that she pushed for. At University House at the University of Sydney a room is named after her. I think she founded the Australian Federation of Graduate Women, which permeates Australia-wide. She then became a professor, even though she had a senior role at the University of Sydney, because she was a female; that was the premise of her article in the 1985 book. That is just a little background.

When I started in my profession of engineering—this is leading to a question—there were only two girls in my starting year. Now, many women are doing engineering. Obviously, the field has opened up in different types of areas such as information technology and environmental engineering and a whole lot of things. Much of that has been transformed by having specific role models and strong women promoting the careers available in the profession and establishing a Western Australian branch for women in Engineers Australia. What funds are available to assist organisations such as Engineers Australia that might want to promote women to do STEM subjects?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I thank the member for his question. He has spoken about his aunt before and has every reason to be more impressed by those sorts of achievements back when so few women were working in that area. She must have been a very capable woman. I will quickly digress, too. The Labor Party took many fresh ideas to the election in March. One of the ideas and commitments that we made was to name a government building after May Holman, who was the first Labor woman to be elected to an Australian Parliament. Obviously, Edith Cowan was the first woman to be elected to an Australian Parliament, but May Holman was the first Labor woman. What was significant about May Holman was that she was elected in 1925, only a few years after Britain had recognised universal suffrage, and she was 31 years old. She held the seat of Forrest, which, at the time represented the logging communities, and she served three full terms of Parliament. That is a really significant achievement at that time for someone of her age. May Holman was technically elected for another term, but she died after a car accident on the eve of her fourth election. She was involved in a car accident on the Friday and died on the Monday after her election. John Curtin was one of her pallbearers and he spoke about her magnificent achievements. Some of her signature legislation was around the health and safety of timber workers in the electorate that she represented. It would be really good if more young women understood the achievements of people like the member's Aunt or May Holman. Before the election, Mark McGowan made a commitment to name a government building after May Holman. There used to be a May Holman Centre on St Georges Terrace, but then the state government sold the building to a Chinese company and now that building is very unimaginatively named Golden Square; that is a real loss. However, in due course we will name a building after May Holman.

In answer to the member's question, there are the women's grants that I referred to. It is not a large pool but up to \$10 000 is available for groups that promote women going into STEM occupations. I would like to do some more work with the Minister for Science; Innovation and ICT, Dave Kelly, around this area. It might be that government funds are needed to promote women into these areas, but when a government does not have a lot of money to play with, one of the challenges is that it is forced to be a bit more creative with its programs. I have been heartened by some of the employers I have met over the last 10 years who are genuinely interested in improving equity within their organisations. A number of groups are grappling with how to do that effectively. One group that particularly impressed me, which it is not necessarily a STEM group, was a construction company called the Georgiou Group. In many of its classifications in technical and engineering areas, when four vacancies are available, it advertises for and will appoint 50 per cent women. If it cannot appoint 50 per cent women, it will appoint only the number of people that represents 50 per cent women. For instance, if it has four vacancies and it can find only one adequate women who fits the bill, it will appoint only two people, even though it has more vacancies. That company has gone a long way in not only talking about improving equity and the number of women in senior positions, but also putting determined policies in place. To answer the member's question, there is also a role for government in harnessing and amplifying those ideas. The University of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University are working for the international Athena Scientific Women's Academic Network accreditation, which is quite hard to get. It is recognition that those universities are trying to encourage women's participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. I know the vice-chancellor of Edith Cowan and have heard him speak a number of times. There are some very determined policies at that university. I recently spoke with the vice-chancellor of

UWA about its efforts on this front. The funds available are limited, but I think with determined action we can harness the initiatives out there. As government we can use that platform to make sure that initiatives like Athena SWAN are celebrated and amplified. I was just advised that every government agency will have a responsibility to do what it can to promote women. The member has pointed out that we need to do better in regard to senior executive service positions. The Department of Communities graduate program currently has more women than men, and we need to look at every opportunity to promote the cause of equity in government and ministries.

[12.50 pm]

Mr W.R. MARMION: I refer to page 236 of budget paper No 2. This is a further question on the two earlier-discussed new women's refuges. Quite often there is community concern about the location of anything the government puts in, but women's refuges sometimes create some angst in a community. My question is about stakeholder consultation. Have the locations been identified; what type of consultation has taken place on the two locations; and what sort of response has the minister had from stakeholders, which probably includes the local authority?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The locations of the two new refuges have not yet been identified. Importantly, when they have there will be proper consultation with the community and local stakeholders. I am not sure whether the member is aware, but refuges are often not that obvious. People are not aware of where refuges are in their local community. They are designed to be discreet and not easy to find. Having said that, the locations of the two refuges has not been determined. There will be consultation on the location, given that discretion about identifying the location must be maintained. It is a consideration for us.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I am in the minister's camp. I agree. I live very close to Graylands Hospital, and no-one around there was concerned at all. That type of hospital is higher up the category of population concern than a women's refuge, and I totally agree. Nevertheless, the minister will have this dilemma. Once the consultation starts, people will come out and say, "I don't want one near me." It is a catch-22 issue. It could probably be argued that if people were not consulted, they would not even know about it. I guess that is a dilemma ministers have. We had it when we were in government whenever we wanted to put anything along these lines in place. Given that the minister has not yet identified a specific location but is working through that, can minister advise how many beds are likely to be at each of the two refuges?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, we have not yet gone to that level of detail. Over the forthcoming year we will be working to identify the best models for the cohort that might use that facility. A few different designs are now used for women's refuges, and we will be particularly assessing the view of the services that operate in refuges on what is most effective. I imagine we will try to build in some self-contained units, so that when people are under stress and need a bit of time on their own they can go somewhere where the facilities are not common use. My view is that that is an important part of our design. That will also enable teenage boys to be present in those refuges, if necessary. Now, if the boys are too old, it can cause problems if they need to be with their parents. It can cause problems with other residents. More discrete, self-contained units will lend themselves to allowing older boys in those communities. Shared bathrooms does not lend itself to having older boys in the facilities.

The CHAIR: Does the member for Nedlands have a further or separate question?

Mr W.R. MARMION: This is my last further question on women's refuges. I am happy to pull stumps after that. I am after data that the minister probably will not have. I just need the data, so the minister can just say if she cannot give it to me. I have advice that in another member's electorate around the Bentley area, 30 per cent of the women cared for in a particular refuge are migrants. The member suggests that they are mainly from China and Africa. Does the minister have data for refuges around the state on migrants so that we can get a bit of an idea of the break-up?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I ask the member to put that question on notice. It will not be by refuge; it might be in terms of clientele. If that is available, we are happy to get information to the member. I am conscious of the short week, and I wonder whether it is possible for the member to put that question on notice so that we can try to pull that information together if it is not readily available.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes. No problem.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 12.57 to 2.00 pm