

Chair; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Shane Love; Mr Donald Punch; Mr John Carey; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Mr Reece Whitby; Ms S. McGurk; Mr D. Punch

Division 36: Communities — Services 1 to 6, Child Protection; Women's Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services, \$931 467 000 —

Ms S.E. Winton, Chair.

Ms S.F. McGurk, Minister for Child Protection; Women's Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services.

Ms M. Andrews, Director General.

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

Mr N. Wijayadasa, Chief Finance Officer.

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

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

Mr D. Settelmaier, Senior Policy Adviser.

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available tomorrow. The Chair will ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. If an adviser needs to answer from the lectern, will they please state their name prior to their answer. 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, and I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information will be provided. I will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by Friday, 30 October 2020. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge that through the online questions system.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: Members, do you have any questions? Member for Carine?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Thank you very much. Minister, page 520, paragraph 13. Can I say up-front that most of my questions will be coming from service summary 1 and 2, homelessness and community services, but some will relate to other points, if I go back to that. But on that particular point, on page 520, in paragraph 13, it talks about the Housing First initiative, which the minister first announced on 4 December 2019 and then indicated she was bringing the program forward in May 2020, and we now obviously on 21 October 2020, 10 months later. I just wanted to know how many people, from that announcement on 4 December 2019, have been housed as a result of the Housing First initiative?

The CHAIR: Minister?

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Thank you. I am happy to speak to this matter. The member is correct that late last year we announced a few initiatives, including our overall policy, a 10-year policy called "All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030". Members may have heard me speak about this publicly, but I know, member for Carine, you in particular were critical of how long it took to develop that strategy, but I think now we have been vindicated in the amount of work that was put in to developing that strategy. First of all, there was a research piece that underpinned it, so we had good evidence of where homelessness is manifest throughout the state.

The University of Western Australia's centre for social impact helped us do that analysis, and that research is currently and publicly available. The strategy drew on evidence from around the country and also around the world around the best approaches to deal with homelessness. It is divided into two sections; the approach to dealing with homelessness. The efforts over the first five years will be around those people who are rough sleeping. I know they are issues that have been given a lot of public attention, rightly. It is very distressing and frustrating to see people still sleeping rough in our metropolitan and regional centres, or anywhere, when we have such a lot of resources in our state.

In any case, the announcement released the 10-year strategy, but also funding for the Housing First homelessness initiative of \$34.5 million and the announcement was that that would be funded for 2020–21, so this financial year we find ourselves in now, not the financial year just gone. It is essentially a Housing First initiative, and I am happy to speak more about how Housing First works. I know members here have heard me speak about that at length. I understand your question was what —

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Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: How many people have actually been housed as a result of this initiative since October?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The announcement at the time was that that money would be available for the financial year 2020–21 —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Well, it was not, actually. If you look at the announcement —

The CHAIR: Member for Carine, let the minister finish.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That was the announcement, however, because of COVID and the need to fast-track activity as a result of COVID, we were able to get agreement that that project be expedited, and as a result, the contracts now to start putting that work on the ground have been issued. The lead contract is for Ruah Community Services. In fact, there was quite a bit of cooperation between the service sector providers to say we should not have an open tender for this work and we needed to get it out on the ground as quickly as possible. I had Shelter WA, Western Australian Council of Social Service and a number of the large not-for-profit providers involved in homelessness come and see me and say that they thought that made sense, and that contract has now been issued. So in answer to your question, member, there are not people on the ground doing that work yet, but I am confident that we will be able to build on the work of 50 Lives, 50 Homes. In Fremantle we have had a variation on that, 20 Lives, 20 Homes, which is a Housing First initiative, and I know in Fremantle, for instance, in both of those instances, they have had some very good results.

The CHAIR: Through the Chair, member for Carine. Further question?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Just to clarify, minister, that 4 December 2019 announcement, and the fact that you are bringing it forward because of COVID. As at 21 October 2020, even though it was starting on 1 July, according to you, but it was brought forward I believe because of COVID, not one single person has been housed in the four months since 1 July to 21 October. That is what you are saying, is it not—not one person has been housed?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There have certainly been people housed as a result of the Housing First work. A significant number of people have been housed, both through 50 Lives, 50 Homes and 20 Lives, 20 Homes in Fremantle. Part of the approach of Housing First is that it is not a quick-fix solution.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Obviously not.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is getting people on the ground to work with outreach workers to work with those people who are street present and to find suitable housing. Can I flag with the committee and also generally that we are concerned that suitable housing stock will be an issue? Part of the model of Housing First that we funded under this initiative and also trialled in the Fremantle 20 Lives, 20 Homes project was an element of rental subsidy that is given so that people can access the private rental market. We then have a community service provider that acts as a broker and helps maintain a steady tenancy so that the private landlord is not dealing directly with the tenant. For example, it could be Access Housing or Foundation Housing that manage the tenancy. Of course, we know that private rentals now are at a premium and there is just not many in the system. We are trying to build our capacity in the public system, but essentially if you are pushing those people, what you do then is you are pushing into a queue. Now, there might be times when we do that, but that is the dilemma we have.

To answer your question, member, these systems, which are more sophisticated ways of dealing with homelessness, take time to set up. One of the other delays for a lot of the service providers is that they were dealing with COVID-19 pandemic as well. They were having to manage the risks within their own organisations; how to provide emergency food relief and how to manage their own staff, who were fearful at the beginning of the pandemic. It was all those sorts of issues, as well as the crisis planning and scenario planning that we did with the sector early on. There has been a lot going on this year and I think we will be well placed and will start to see some good results of the Housing First initiative.

[9.10 am]

The CHAIR: Question, member for Carine.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: When will the first person under the housing initiative actually be housed; and also how many people will be housed under this initiative in the first year?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes. A number have been allocated and funded for 50 Lives, 50 Homes under the Housing First initiative. In the regional centres of Bunbury, Geraldton, Rockingham, Mandurah, Peel, it is 20 people per year, and in the metropolitan area, by memory, I think it is 70 people per year that will be housed under that approach.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: When will the first person be housed? When will the first person from this initiative that you announced back on 4 December 2019 actually find themselves in a home?

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Ms S.F. McGURK: I cannot tell the member when people will first be housed, but I can tell him that the contracts have now been let for the overall management of the system and we are hoping to get people out on the ground before the end of the year.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: So, minister, this is your key plan for solving homelessness—one of the key initiatives you have—and you do not know when the first person will actually be housed. From an announcement back on 4 December 2019, you could not do the preparatory work to make sure that from 1 July, or bringing it forward, that this initiative could actually be implemented from day one. You have been dragging your feet the whole time, talking about it every day, but doing nothing, as far as I can tell.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Member, I absolutely refute that we have been doing nothing since that time. As I said, there has been a pandemic throughout most of 2020, so there has been quite a lot going on for both the department and government more generally and, importantly, our community sector partners. The Housing First contract that has now been let with the chief provider, which will be Ruah, will be the backbone to that work and they will look to getting outreach workers on the ground before the end of the year. It is important that we have a solid system where we know we are going to get good outcomes. I know the member has been critical of Housing First —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: No, I support the Housing First initiative very much.

Ms S.F. McGURK: — but we can look at Fremantle's efforts with 20 Lives, 20 Homes, where I was able, as the local member, to get \$1 million from local businesses to support that two-year program. After the first year, 21 people in Fremantle are no longer street present as a result of that initiative. They are very good outcomes in Housing First, but they do take some time to set up. We need to make sure there is a good backbone in place, that there is good monitoring of the system, and I do not shy away from the challenge that we are going to have of finding suitable stock, either with public or private rental stock. Now, that is partly because some people want to live in metropolitan centres that are very popular, sometimes there is a demand for family, sometimes there is a demand for single-unit dwellings, so that can be challenging. But the results from Housing First, as we know, have been very solid and I think the background work and the foundations that we have put in place will pay good dividends.

These are the figures I was looking for while I was fumbling around in my papers, member. For 50 Lives, 50 Homes, which is a Housing First initiative, the independent evaluation of that program found in its first four years that 237 people were taken off the street and housed, and 92 per cent of those people—these are street present people; some of the most vulnerable people that are present in our community—were still in their house after 12 months. They are very impressive results. Getting those results is not easy and we need to make sure we put in good foundations. I understand the member's frustration, which I hope is being driven by his concern for homeless people, but I also note we spend a lot of money now providing good services to people that are homeless. Over \$90 million a year is spent between the state and the federal governments providing services.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: You indicated that 90 people in total would be housed under this Housing First initiative—70 in the metro area and 20 in the country. Considering there are well over 9 000 homeless people and well over 1 000 rough sleepers, as your key platform for housing solutions for homeless people, how is 90 going into 9 000-plus? That is based on the 2016 census, but we know the homeless numbers are much bigger than that. Can you please explain that and, also, in relation to the cost increases are those figures based on the cost increases and the lack of availability of housing? I do not understand how you are going to help 9 000-plus homeless people with just 90 people being housed.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Can I clarify your understanding of our commitment. It was not 20 across the three regional centres, it was 20 in each of the three regional centres per year.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: That is 130.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right. That is through the Housing First initiative. That is on top of the \$93 million that the government spends each year providing housing and homelessness support for those people who are street present. The approach of Housing First, and a strategic approach to dealing with homelessness, has not been done by a state government before, and we need to acknowledge that it has taken time to set up some of these systems. One of the other reforms that is encapsulated in the 10-year strategy is what is called a no wrong door approach. This is, if you like, the back-of-house systems redesigns to make sure that when vulnerable people go into different services they are picked up where they left off, and do not have to retell their stories, and that the services in organisations are more connected in their work. Quite a bit of detailed work has been done in that regard, and also what was funded when we made the announcement last year was an online portal, which is a modern approach that provides real-time access to real-time information for where —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Point of order, please?

The CHAIR: Member for Carine.

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Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I do not need to know all that detail. I understand all that perfectly well. I am asking specifically —

The CHAIR: Member for Carine! You cannot shout out “point of order” and then —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Sorry, through the Chair.

The CHAIR: What is your point of order?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: My point of order is I am asking a specific question about now the 130 people who will be housed every year will solve our current homelessness problem of 9 000– plus people, if that is the main platform for this government initiative. I do not need to know the entry point and everything else.

The CHAIR: So your point of order is?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I would like the minister to focus on the question and not —

The CHAIR: Thank you, member for Carine. Minister, can I bring you back to the question.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: We have not got much time.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: We have four hours, member for Carine.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I have a lot of questions. If you keep talking like that, we will never get through anything!

The CHAIR: Member for Carine, let us start out the way we hope to continue for the next four hours.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I just want an answer!

The CHAIR: Thank you. We do not need your little side commentary.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: What I was attempting to explain to the member and others here is that some of the reform that we are implementing is an important investment in making sure that all of our systems are talking to each other, and that there is a modern approach to dealing with a very vulnerable and, I think everyone acknowledges, a very complex cohort of people. If the member thinks that this issue is straightforward to resolve, then I would welcome to hear what he did while he was in opposition on this matter, because we know that housing some of the people that we see street present in our metropolitan centres, in regional centres across the state, is some of the most difficult work that is done. I acknowledge the community sector organisations that put a lot of heart and effort and expertise into doing that work; and that applies to a lot of government agencies. But these are complex clients and we need to look at not only good work on the ground, but evidence-based approaches and also systems redesign, and I think that will yield results for us. That is what the evidence is showing us in other cities around the world and that is what we are drawing upon to apply our effort here in Western Australia.

[9.20 am]

The CHAIR: Member for Carine, do you have a further last question?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Further last question on this particular point. Minister, are you going to ask for additional funding for this program based on the cost blowout and the 10 000-plus homeless people out there? Is the minister actually going to ask for additional funding to help the most vulnerable people in Western Australia based on the fact that the government has a \$1.2 billion surplus projected for this year? Because the minister has not shown us how?

Ms S.F. MCGURK: I do not know what cost blowout the member is referring to.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: You said it was the cost of housing. Remember you said the housing is not available.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Well, a cost of housing and the housing demand is a little bit different from a cost blowout. Perhaps you might want to be —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It will cost more money to get those places filled, so the funding you have may not cover —

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Do you intend to keep interrupting me while I am speaking?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: No, I am just clarifying for you.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Member for Carine, I am clarifying for you that there has been no cost blowout. We have been very careful about how we are building these systems and on what. I have referred to what evidence we are using, but also what existing systems are in place. We have talked about the 50 Lives, 50 Homes approach in Western Australia, with over 20 not-for-profit organisations as partners in that, and the results have been very impressive. So, we will be building on that existing work. We are not starting from scratch, and I talked about Fremantle as well. We will look at what is an effective use of government spending. We always have to look at that; it is not just a matter of pouring more money into this. If we look at emergency accommodation for some of the people who are street present at the moment, unless it is effective, those people will stay in their accommodation for a very short period of time, and then leave again. But I do draw your attention, member, to page 526 of budget paper No 2, where there is an explanation in note (b), under “Homelessness Support Services” that talks about

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the number of clients who have been assisted and are envisaged to be assisted. The budget target for 2020–21 is 15 795 clients, and then as the financial years go on, 17 261 is the 2019–20 actual—I am getting this confused. I will just say that again. Over the financial years 2018–19, 2019–20 and 2020–21, between actual and budget, there has been an increase. Members will see that the budget target for 2020–21 is 17 300 people that we are projected to assist through our homelessness budgets.

The CHAIR: Member for Moore, further question?

Mr R.S. LOVE: The minister has referred to the rolling out of the Housing First homelessness initiative to the regional centres of Bunbury and Geraldton, and that there will be 20 people per year served. Can the minister outline, in those two instances, where the program is at, if it is commenced? Have the contracts been let and when does the minister expect to see some service provided in those two centres?

Ms S.F. McGURK: In the overall planning, the services in Bunbury and Geraldton will be overseen by Ruah Community Services as well. As I said, we were hoping to get people on the ground before the end of the year. So it is the same system, they will then start to contract. As an overall system design Ruah is the main contract holder, but they will not do the work on the ground necessarily; they will start to work with service providers. Services have not been let for the regional work on the ground, but that will be occurring very soon, and we are scheduled to get people on the ground before the end of the year.

The CHAIR: Member for Moore through me; further, question, thank you.

Mr R.S. LOVE: When you say “soon”, when is “soon” and what is the process to select the service provider in those regional areas?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I might ask the —

The CHAIR: Through the Chair. Mr Wijayadasa?

Mr N. Wijayadasa: Thank you, members. We are currently going through a computing process to understand how to play it out. We have some shortlisted parties and we intend to award in the next two months or somewhere there.

The CHAIR: Further question.

Mr R.S. LOVE: When do you think the service may be commenced in those centres?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Our ambition is to have those people on the ground before the end of the year. That is what I stated before.

The CHAIR: Okay. Member for Moore, new question?

Mr R.S. LOVE: No, that is all.

The CHAIR: Member for Bunbury.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I have a new question. I refer to page 518 of spending changes and the line item listed under “Ongoing Initiatives” titled “Child Protection Demand Growth” which indicates an additional \$10.5 million for child protection services in this financial year. Can the minister please outline how changes to the cost and demand model has resulted in extra funding, and could she explain how this funding is consistent with the McGowan government’s commitment to child safety?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you for the question, member. This is an important matter and one that often gets public attention because child protection is important work. We are dealing with some of the most vulnerable members of our community and it is important that we have not only the right amount of resources on the ground, but that they have the right skills and support around them. Since 2007–08 there has been a cost-and-demand model agreed between the child protection functions of government. It has been called various names over the years, but it is under the Department of Communities at present. That is an analysis between the department and Treasury to understand what are the drivers of the demand in child protection and, as an obvious example, looking at its crudest measure, what is happening with population numbers in children. For example, about 56 per cent of our children in care at the moment are Aboriginal, what is the population growth number for Aboriginal young people. That is at its crudest measure, but in a more complex form the discussions also incorporate the feeders for, and understanding of the drivers of child protection so that we can better respond to not only concerns, but the supports for families.

As a result of that, we have seen significant increases in the budgets for child protection over years, but in 2019–20 the Department of Communities and Treasury agreed to have a deeper look at some of the drivers of child protection matters. As a result of that, we have been able to receive a higher amount than was previously allocated. So, as a result of that, we have an additional \$10.5 million allocated in the 2019–20 budget and a further \$7.9 million allocated in the 2020–21 budget. But that is just in addition to what would have been previously allocated. If you look at the cost-and-demand model more generally, I think just under \$30 million is allocated, so in 2019–20, including those

amounts that I just spoke about, there was \$29.4 million of increased funding to child protection work, so that is child protection and out-of-home care services, and in 2020–21, it is \$29.7 million. I think it is worth people taking note that nearly \$30 million has been given each year to child protection and out-of-home care services as a result of a deeper understanding of what are the drivers. Far from sometimes people thinking there are cuts—there are always pressures on this work; this very, very demanding work—I think this demonstrates a commitment by government to understanding the contributing factors and to properly resource as a result. Again, I have said publicly, but at the end of the last financial year, since 2017 and the end of the last financial year, there were 153 new and additional FTEs put into frontline child protection work as a result of those funding increases.

[9.30 am]

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Further question on that point. With regard to the additional funding in child protection, I note the distressing story on the front page of today's paper about a young girl taking her life because her perpetrator had been released on bail. Specifically with regard to perpetrators having access to their victims—I again bring the minister's attention back to Roebourne, which keeps coming up—can the minister guarantee that no children will come into contact with or have access to their perpetrators in Roebourne or through the school system there, or more generally; and what is the minister doing to protect the children there?

Ms S.F. MCGURK: I am not sure that this was particularly related to the previous question.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is child protection, and the minister said she just got funding.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: It is the whole portfolio, member.

The CHAIR: Member for Carine, can you be a bit more specific in terms of —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I was being very specific. The minister spoke about massive increases in funding for child protection and caseworkers, and I am just asking about children who are victims of whether it be domestic family violence or sexual assault et cetera. I am just asking whether any of this funding is going to protect these children and whether or not they are still at risk.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: I just want to make sure I have the current information in front of me. The member has jumped to talk about particular cases of child abuse, one very tragically reported *The West Australian* today. For a number of reasons, I was disturbed to hear about that case, not least of which I think there needs to be a lot of caution around reporting of suicides and child suicides. My thoughts—obviously, a lot of Western Australians share with me in this and I will be reflecting their sentiments—and our hearts are with their family and that community at the moment. I cannot imagine what they are going through. Suicide, particularly child suicide, is a very complex and difficult area, and where that intersects with child sex abuse is all the more tragic. Leaving that matter reported in *The West Australian* today aside, the member asked a question about Roebourne, and he raised a number of issues there. If I could go to the last question, perhaps the member could just repeat his last question?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is more in terms of making sure that the victims are not coming into contact with their perpetrators and that they are being protected.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: That question was first dealt with when we came to government in 2017. At the Minister for Education's initiative a meeting was convened of all the agencies and ministers where these issues could intersect. In this regard it was the Minister for Police, the Minister for Education, and me, as Minister for Child Protection, and the respective agencies. There is now a protocol or system that is in place, whereby there is good information sharing, first of all, between the agencies. That has been in place since 2017. I hasten to say that there was no such system under the previous government. There was no such protocol or agreement of what would occur if there was a child with harmful sexual behaviours who may be attending a school, either with their victim or not.

I give members the assurance that the number of young people with sexual offence charges attending school continues to be very low across the state. Where a young person charged or convicted of a sexual offence attends a public school, every case is monitored, assessed and managed by the Department of Education, Western Australia Police Force and the Department of Communities and the assessments are based on what is best for the school community and the individual young people. The focus of the Department of Communities in regard to child protection is on creating safety for the affected young people by developing trust, increasing networks and protected behaviours around the young person, and providing information about sexual health and consent. This is distinct from labelling the young person as a perpetrator or offender. Often young people who are displaying harmful sexual behaviours are, in fact, doing that because they were themselves victims of sex abuse and that matter has not been managed or responded to effectively. That is part of the challenge we have in government and one that I am very alive to.

I also let the member know that in line with the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which contained a raft of recommendations for children with harmful sexual behaviours, the Department of Communities is undertaking a review and development of new policy to inform our response processes

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to child sexual abuse, including young people who commit sexual offences. I am in regular contact with some of the leading authorities on this matter nationally as well as my counterparts in other states to understand their initiatives and how we can better respond in Western Australia. An important point to make in regard to this is that we have some resources upon which we can draw in Western Australia. I refer, for instance, to the child advocacy centres headed by Parkerville Children and Youth Care. There are two of those in the metropolitan area now—the George Jones Child Advocacy Centre and the Stan and Jean Perron Child Advocacy Centre—where there is a co-location of community sector organisation, in this case, Parkerville, child protection officers, police officers and associated psychiatric supports that will work very much side by side and focused on the child themselves. This is considered world leading in terms of the joined-up approach. We have been able to use that sort of model to develop a WA centre for responding to child sex abuse. It is in its early stages, but we have partnered with the University of South Australia, Professor Leah Bromfield and her team, to begin the WA centre for responding to child sex abuse, where we could in fact look at the evidence showing us how we can best work with children who are affected by child sex abuse or, for instance in this case, who are displaying harmful sexual behaviours. I think it is important that that is an opportunity for us, too, to work with Aboriginal-controlled organisations to make sure we are doing culturally appropriate and credible work in this space.

Because if you think about regional centres or remote communities, we need to start to understand how we interrupt this cycle of harmful sexual abuse throughout society that then creates young people with their own distorted views of sexuality and their own distorted behaviours that need proper therapy interventions.

[9.40 am]

The CHAIR: Member for Carine, further question?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Further question on that point, as obviously the minister did not answer my question. I specifically want to know whether the children there are safe—yes or no? And, second, are they coming into contact with the perpetrators? They are very simple questions.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Children where, member?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: In Roebourne.

The CHAIR: Member for Carine. I understand the question you are asking. Perhaps you could direct or ask the question in terms of where in the budget —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is on the budget funding that the member for Bunbury asked a question —

The CHAIR: I understand. So perhaps we can base the question around that and we will get an answer based on that as opposed to having long questions and long answers.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I have a very short question.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Point of order, Chair. My question was very specifically about demand growth in relation to child protection. It was not a question about a geographic specific range of possible issues.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: If the minister does not want to answer the question, that is fine!

The CHAIR: Member for Carine, I do not think it is a question that the minister does not want to answer. Let us give the opportunity for the minister to add anything.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: I will take the point that has been raised by the member for Bunbury and yourself, Chair, and that is: what is the specific line item that the member is referring to, and can he be more specific in his question? Is he asking me whether every child in Roebourne is safe? Is that what he is asking me?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: No, the ones that have been victims.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: And what line item in the budget is he referring to?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Okay. Let me refer the minister back to budget paper No 3, page 112. There is no funding for demand growth —

The CHAIR: Member for Carine, is this going to be a new question or is it on the specific question?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I will come back to this later; I will ask a new question.

The CHAIR: Before you do, I think the member for Moore would like to ask a new question.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes. I will just ask a fairly simple question and then perhaps we can go back to the member's question. On page 519 of the budget documents, under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency", in paragraph 5.4, there is an allocation of \$2.6 million to extend the Kimberley family violence service trial by two years. If we look at page 518, where there are spending changes, there is a line item under the COVID recovery plan, titled "Kimberley Family Violence Service", with an allocation in the budget of \$1.3 million this year and \$1.326 million

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in the following year, but there is nothing in the actual spend for 2019–20. I was just wondering whether that trial ceased, or whether, as it says, this is an extension of a service. There was no funding for the service in the previous year, so had that service actually ceased? If it is a trial, are there any metrics available as to the success or otherwise of the money that has been spent so far?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you, member. There are a couple of things about this. It appears on page 518 under “Kimberley Family Violence Service” without a budget estimate in 2019–20.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Right.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am happy to get advice about that. There has been funding for that service previously. This table is about a spending change. It was not that the funding was not applied previously. It was applied previously, but this particular table on page 518 reflects spending changes that occurred. We have continued this program for another two years, and I spoke about this when we had a community cabinet in the Kimberley recently. This is an acknowledgement of the particular circumstances in the Kimberley, with the high rates of domestic violence that occur there, and what will be different about this particular spend. Up to now, Anglicare WA has been providing a service under this particular program. It will continue to provide that service while we put out the contracts for expressions of interest. We are particularly interested in making sure, after recommendations from an evaluation undertaken, that communities seek proposals from applicants to have place-based interventions that are flexible, culturally responsive, informed by local needs, but importantly, designed or where possible delivered in partnership with Aboriginal-controlled organisations. That will be our preference.

When we delivered that news recently in the Kimberley, when I was in Broome, that was a very welcome announcement because it is important that, where possible, we make sure that local providers who have good relationships with the local community, credibility with the local community and really understand their needs are providing those services. That is not to detract from Anglicare at all, but as with non-English speaking culturally and linguistically diverse communities, it is our preference to try to get CALD communities to get particular services to deliver their programs, and with Aboriginal people, if we get the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service to do that work, I think we will have better outcomes.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The other part of the question I asked was around the metrics of how the trial had been assessed. The minister has spoken in fairly broad terms, but I am wondering whether she could supply me with some information about the success or otherwise of the trial thus far and what the performance requirements will be for the continuation of the trial.

Ms S.F. McGURK: We have been very keen in any of our work to make sure that there is feedback from the ground on how those services are being provided. I have spoken a lot about our efforts being evidence based and making sure that there is a framework around the work being done. We are endeavouring to do some evaluation of how that is being done through a lot of our work. I am not sure whether that particular evaluation is available, and I just ask that the member put that on notice if he is interested in getting the particular outcomes of that trial. It has been a relatively small amount, but it is additional funding, so there are already existing services in the West and East Kimberley. As with many community services, there are in fact many services across the board, and particularly in the East Kimberley it can be hard to fill some of those places, but there is a lot of work done across the Kimberley to provide on-the-ground assistance. I just ask that the member, if possible, put that question on notice.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I want to ask about the COVID response to homelessness and the Hotels with Heart program. That can be referenced to the fifth line item on page 518, the first significant issue impacting the agency on page 519, the first and second line items on page 123 and probably half a dozen other areas in the budget. The minister can pick which one she would like to look at.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The member speaks very quickly. I know I do, too, but it would just be useful to find my papers if the member was a bit more specific.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Sorry, yes. I am asking about the Hotels with Heart pilot.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I understand that. Is it on page 518?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is not referenced specifically. It is homeless support services.

The CHAIR: Member for Carine, you are supposed to reference your question to a line item, so pick one if you like.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I am. The first significant issue impacting the agency on page 519 will do. That refers to the COVID recovery pandemic response. I just want to ask a question about the response during the pandemic. Noting that New South Wales spent \$34 million housing the homeless, Victoria spent \$15 million and Queensland spent \$24.7 million, and, according to the statistics shown in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, in total they housed and took off the streets more than 33 000 rough sleepers as a minimum, how many homeless people, rough sleepers, did we help during that pandemic and how much money did we spend during the pandemic period?

[9.50 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Can I just remind the member that we are still in the pandemic, we have not resolved the question of COVID-19 and we are still trying to manage the risk assessment across the community, but if I understand him correctly, he is talking about the period around Easter—around March, April—when we had a sort of relative close-down of a number of sections in the community. I remember that was the case around Easter and the weeks after that. There was a lot of concern then about how we worked to address the risks to people who were street present—are street present—and made sure that they were looked after. They are particularly vulnerable for a whole lot of reasons; I think that is pretty obvious. There are a couple of things: the department set up task forces through which it worked with the sector to understand those immediate needs and get feedback about how they could be dealt with. It is important to get feedback from the community sector on the ground to understand what the risks are, where those risks are physically and how to best manage what is a difficult cohort. One of the initiatives that the member referred to is the Hotels with Heart project. That was a trial. It was important to note that this was a health-based response, so it was not designed to have a long-term outcome for those homeless people. Of course, if it did, all the better, but that was not what it was designed to do. It was designed to address at a moment in time how we could get those people off the streets and keep them safe. It was put together with a range of people, including people from Royal Perth hospital. The Homeless Healthcare group was part of the project design, as were a number of not-for-profit organisations and the Department of Communities. There was some publicity at the time because we had an offer from one of the large hotels in the CBD, Pan Pacific, to participate in the program. The program was that up to 30 people would be able to be given accommodation in the Pan Pacific. Even though they were not COVID positive, they would be asked to quarantine for 14 days to manage the risks, because at the time we did not deem it was safe for those people to move in and out of the hotel—that hotel was also being used as a quarantine hotel—but we would give quite a bit of support. For instance, there was security on each floor, and we used two floors. There were nurses visiting those clients every day. Preceding those clients going into the hotel, there were outreach workers who interviewed people on the street for who wanted to be part of the hotel trial. In fact, in my community in Fremantle I speak to some of the people who are street present and one of the women I spoke to said “I was asked to do that, it just wasn’t for me. I couldn’t stay in a hotel for two weeks and I decided not to take it up but my mate did and he said that it went all right for him.” People went into it voluntarily. To their credit, some of those people stayed in for the 14 days. As I have observed elsewhere, even the most seasoned hotel-stayers found staying in a hotel room for two weeks quite challenging, and we can imagine that it was in this case. In any case, people were asked to stay in their hotel rooms. They were given quite a lot of support, with nurses and doctors regularly visiting and community sector organisations visiting as well in a safe way. Can I just thank the Uniting WA, Homeless Healthcare, the Pan Pacific and Department of Communities and Ruah Community Services, which worked in the program.

Twenty-two of the 30 participants remained in contact with services following the pilot and 15 were assisted into accommodation. The cost of that was \$408 475, so it was quite an expensive intervention. I have to say, people really liked the idea of being able to use empty hotel rooms to assist homeless people and I know it was picked up in other states, but without intensive supports alongside that accommodation, it is not suitable. In fact, the evaluation was that if that sort of model was being looked at again, we might look at people being able to have a balcony or access to fresh air or some outside space if we were hoping to get them off the street quickly.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Based on the very small sample size, can the minister tell me what the government’s plans are if we have a second wave in Western Australia to deal with the 1 000-plus rough sleepers and the 9 000-plus homeless people that we currently have? What is the government planning to do?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I might ask the director general to speak to this. She has a responsibility too, under the COVID-response plan for the state.

Ms M. Andrews: The emergency management arrangements are still in place, as the member knows, and there is important leadership coming from the health department and police around the emergency management and the state health incident control centre, which are coordinating the preparedness and outbreak planning. We are working with and supporting them in that process. Our responsibilities under the emergency management arrangements relate to the welfare-response component of that. What has served us so well up to this point has been the coordination across government and the leadership coming out of the health coordination centre. Within the Department of Communities we have the State Welfare Incident Coordination centre and we are partnering with it in the preparation of the outbreak plans. The focus has been on many of the different vulnerable cohorts, but, as we have seen in other jurisdictions, people are in congregate living and so on. That outbreak planning is being led out of the health department and we are contributing to it. It is not seen primarily as responsibility of the homelessness portfolio, but rather all that work is happening under the umbrella of the emergency management work, which we are contributing to.

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Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: What does that actually mean on the ground? If tomorrow there was an outbreak and the 1 000-plus rough sleepers were infected with COVID, what would the response of the state immediately be to deal with that, and how much funding is set aside to deal with that issue?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will ask the director general to address that point, but just to qualify when the member speaks about 1 000 people who are rough sleeping, good data collection is one of our challenges with homelessness. All sorts of figures get thrown around, and it is part of our strategy to have better data and understanding, not only of the accuracy of the data, but also the people sitting behind it and the case management of them. But 1 000 people rough sleeping, if that is correct, is around the state, so the situation could be very different in a remote community where we have responded very effectively, I might say, and the dynamics of that would be very different, too, if there was a so-called outbreak. I cannot help but remind the committee that it has been over six months since we have had any community contagion in Western Australia, but let us talk about that scenario of an outbreak, for instance amongst a particular cohort that was street present in the metropolitan area. I think the member needs to be more specific, because if there is an outbreak amongst 1 000 people, it could be anywhere. The director general will elaborate on that point.

Ms M. Andrews: In broad terms, the planning and the exercising is exactly what is going on now. We are making the most of this window that we have in terms of preparation. In regard to homeless people, our responsibility and that welfare response, what are the key things we need to have ready? It is going to be around homelessness and finding accommodation and food and services. Our preparedness relates to all of those things, but in particular the data sharing that we are now able to do across government. As the minister has indicated, the other message around that is that we cannot take a cookie-cutter approach from what is sitting in those plans being worked on and think they can work across the state. We have local people on the ground, those local emergency management teams that are doing their version of the plans for their region, and they are doing the hard work with us, coordinated by us, around the accommodation options. It is understanding what the current services look like and how we maintain those if we are moving people into different accommodation. What do the health and other community services need to look like in that?

Remote communities have their own particular risks and challenges, and again, a team has been established. It was established under the emergency management framework and is called the complex task team for remote Aboriginal communities. In the first instance, it worked with Communities, Health and police to return people to country, and now it is doing the planning work for if there is an outbreak. That complex task force team is now sitting in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, so we are working closely with it to support those preparations as well.

[10.00 am]

Mr J.N. CAREY: Is there a program still existing at Hostel G on Stirling Street? How many beds are currently operating as part of the COVID response right now?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is correct. Part of the allocation from Lotterywest to the \$159 million COVID allocation available for community services and other organisations that usually rely on lottery funding has been funding for Uniting WA to provide some emergency accommodation, and there is capacity. It has been a few weeks since I have heard an update, but there were beds available in that accommodation. There was \$1.1 million given to Uniting WA to provide emergency accommodation. We are aware of that. We are aware of the issues on the street at the moment, particularly in Perth and other areas, but I want to stress that without the proper supports for people and the case management, emergency responses will be very short lived. We will get people into some of that accommodation, they will stay there for a short time and then they will leave. We might need to get people into accommodation for a short time in the case of some sort of community contagion, but I think we all agree that we want the responses to be effective. We want them to be cost-effective, but we want them to be effective for those people. That is why we are trying to build the systems, to make sure we can follow those people with case work and get them into accommodation that suits them, and then provide the supports to stabilise those people.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Listening to the discussion here, I am aware, if we are talking about hostels et cetera which are being funded to provide homeless services, that now most of the backpacking facilities in the state are virtually empty. Is that something being looked at as part of an arrangement? I know from discussion I had with a party the other day that that is an issue for those hostels at the moment. They have no clientele due to the fact that there are no international travellers. Could that be a more appropriate placement than a city hotel, for instance, for a homeless person?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is part of the scenario of planning to look at all those sorts of accommodation options, and there are times that budget hotels or hotel rooms, motels and, in some cases, backpackers, are used for emergency accommodation because of geographical location in a regional centre, for instance, or when nothing else is available. There was public discussion about that, I think, late last year. That has been used by successive governments. In this scenario planning they are all possibilities. I hasten to add that appropriate accommodation is part of it, whether it is backpackers or Woodman Point—people might be aware we used Woodman Point for some time, for some

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Aboriginal people—but without proper supports and planning, those people will not stay in that accommodation because their needs are too complex. The reason that they are street present is that their needs are complex. They will stay there for a few nights and then they will leave. That is why we need to continue to work to understand what a better response is—what an effective response is. Not only in the case of the pandemic and if there is some sort of community transmission of the virus, but more generally. How do we make sure that we are responding effectively? Each state across our country, and frankly, the western world—each jurisdiction—is challenged to make sure they have effective responses for those people with complex needs.

My reading of how other states have gone with putting people into hotels and the response that the member for Carine spoke about is that they have not been able to sustain those rooms or that approach, not only because it is very expensive, but it does not work for people to stay in hotels for long periods of time. Whatever accommodation it is, whether a hotel or a backpacker or some sort of recreation camp, for instance, without very, very intensive supports, it will not work. That might be what is needed. We are trying to put that in place in the case of Uniting WA, and we are allocating a lot of money to doing that.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I refer to page 522 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. Under the heading “Outcome Services and Key Performance Information” there is a table, and in the centre column under “Desired outcomes” the third paragraph reads —

Children and young people needing protection are safe from abuse and harm.

That is a key desired outcome. Given the Department of Communities has acknowledged that it is committed to working with police on Operation Timing Belt, what expenditure in the budget is directed towards the Department of Communities working with the police on Operation Timing Belt?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will make two points about that. One is in relation to the cost-and-demand model that I spoke about. I think the member for Bunbury asked me about that early on and where we have increases in funding going into frontline child protection work. For instance, the cost-and-demand model, just in the new calculation, had over \$10 million of increases and then there was something like \$28 million. I have not got the exact figure but I quoted it earlier. It is something like \$27 million to \$28 million of new money going in each year, last year and this financial year to frontline work. This is very much the work of child protection workers to work with other agencies to make sure that we are dealing with vulnerable children. That is the first point that I make.

The second point is the one I referred to about the centre for excellence in responding to child abuse and neglect. That is where I spoke about the child advocacy centres. It is important to note that we are starting on the back of the work of the royal commission into child sex abuse. We are starting to do some of that work. The WA centre is a partnership between Parkerville Children and Youth Care and the Australian Centre for Child Protection. That is Leah Bromfield, whom I spoke about before. She is an academic based in South Australia, and she is part of the Australian Centre for Child Protection. That is a coming together of its work in WA. That centre has received initial funding from lotteries, but I think it is a real opportunity for us to start to understand how we can respond better, not only to identifying areas of risk with child abuse, but also properly responding by having good therapy after we know that young people have been victims of abuse. At the moment we do have some good responses. They are largely based in the metropolitan area. Some of those services are available from regional areas, but I think we could do a lot better, particularly around culturally appropriate responses.

The third point is about the royal commission. We are working through implementing those recommendations. I think it is important that people understand that it is not just me blithely saying, “We are implementing recommendations”, but this a very solid template that we have across Australia to start to put in place a systematic reform for improvements not only to prevent child abuse, but to respond to it quickly should it occur, and then make sure that anyone subject to that abuse is given proper therapy and supports in a culturally appropriate way. Sadly, we know that these are not just historical matters. These are very real matters that confront our society every day. There has been money allocated over the last couple of years to implementing the royal commission recommendations.

[10.10 am]

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: She has not answered the question yet, Chair, so I am waiting for it. It was a specific question.

The CHAIR: That is why I am asking you, member.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: She is still going, Chair.

The CHAIR: Member, I was just asking you whether you had a further question or not.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: No, sorry, Chair. I am just saying she has not finished.

Ms S.F. McGURK: My advisers are just pointing out to me that Operation Timing Belt is specifically a police operation, so it is funded by police, but when there are concerns and victims identified or, in fact, when any of the

perpetrators are young people, they would then work with child protection. The numbers in the assessments and investigations are reflected on page 528 of the *Budget Statements*, where there is an average cost per child involved in child protection cases. For instance, in the 2020–21 budget, the average allocation is \$4 640 per child involved in child protection cases.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Are any extra resources being allocated to support the police in their endeavours with regards to Operation Timing Belt?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There are not in regard to that particular investigation. In fact, I think we should welcome the work of the police and acknowledge that these investigations are not one-off. The public should take some comfort in understanding that these investigations are more likely to be the norm throughout the state. The cost-and-demand model that I have spoken about talks about some of these feeders into investigations. Communities offers active support to victims through respective caseworkers. Some supports being offered include district psychologist counselling and support from school and carers. To answer the member's question, no, there will not be a specific allocation for Operation Timing Belt. Sometimes these investigations get publicity, but often they are investigations occurring across the state and work that is done between agencies across the state.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Was the minister briefed on Operation Timing Belt during 2019–20, and how often is she scheduled to be briefed during 2020–21?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I just want to make sure that I am clear about how I am briefed on these matters. Yes, I am regularly briefed on police operations, and of course I would be made aware of those investigations in regard to Operation Timing Belt. I am sorry, I do not have the particular details of any briefing. In fact, I am just reading through my notes to see whether I can give the member something more specific. I cannot give the specifics of when I was briefed on Operation Timing Belt, but I can assure the member that I have been kept up to date with that operation.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Are we able to take that answer as supplementary information?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I just want to be clear about the sensitivities of some of these operations. Some of those cases that are before the courts and some involve young people in care, so I would not be able to talk about specifics or the details of any of those cases. I am happy for the member to put on notice the question about understanding how much information I was given about Operation Timing Belt and the implications for my portfolio.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: We need to get that written down, then.

The CHAIR: No, I just urge you to put that question on notice.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes. I am just requesting that the member is specific about what he wants in regard to Operation Timing Belt. He could perhaps put that question on notice so that I am clear about what is being required, because there is some sensitivity, particularly around some of the criminal matters that arise, the matters before the courts, and also sensitivity about individual cases, which we will not refer to or talk about.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: When was the minister briefed about the Macy case? We know Macy is not the real name; I guess it is a case name. I understand concerns were raised in 2017 and that Macy was sexually abused in 2018. When was the minister first made aware of the Macy case?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am not able to answer specifically here when I was first made aware of that case. Again can I ask just say to the member that we are here to talk about the budget papers. I just want to understand what line item the member is referring to. We come to estimates understanding the budget and we are able to respond to it, and I am quite prepared to do that, but, it is very difficult to respond about a specific case at this stage in these proceedings.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I will bring the minister back to page 522, which was the item I presented to the minister in the *Budget Statements*, which was the table under “Outcomes, Services and Key Performance Information”, and the column headed “Desired Outcomes”. It states —

Children and young people needing protection are safe from abuse and harm.

My line of questioning is directly relating to a line item in the budget.

The CHAIR: Yes, that is so. Member, I think that is clear but I think the minister is indicating that you might need to put that question on notice and that she is not going to be providing that information.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am sorry; I just do not have information in front of me about when I was first briefed about that particular case. The member understands that a number of children are in care and a number of investigations are occurring. I know this has been potentially contentious at the moment. In my portfolio, it is always a balance of not wanting to talk about individual cases, notwithstanding that a young person might want to. It is about me not wanting to talk about those circumstances. I understand that there are issues that the public has an interest

in, and I do not take away from that, but in these hearings I am not in a position to talk about that specific case or when I was briefed about it. I am quite prepared to take that question on notice. If the member wants to give some me some questions through the usual parliamentary processes, I would be very happy to have a look at them.

[10.20 am]

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Looking for some data and statistics linked to that desired outcome, how often is it the case that, or how often has it been the case over 2019–20, that victims of child sex abuse have been housed in residential care with a person accused of being or known as being a sexual offender?

Ms S.F. McGURK: My latest advice on that particular matter is that that information is kept on individual case files, and, I hasten to say, if it is the case at all, that it would be kept on individual case files and not available at a broad sort of data level across the department. I was asked a question by Hon Nick Goiran in the Legislative Council, which I answered yesterday I think. It referred to the department's guidelines for accommodating children with harmful sexual behaviours. I can assure members as well as the public that those children with harmful sexual behaviours or who have charges or convictions against them are only housed with other children as a last resort. We are very much alive to the risks associated with that and the very difficult situations that the department confronts in which those children need to be accommodated. Quite rightly, they need to be put in the best environment that they can for themselves, but also so as not to put anyone else at risk in the process.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: There is a large budget number in the sixth line item “Care Arrangements and Support Services for Children in the CEO's Care” in the service summary on page 523 of the *Budget Statements*. I think it is \$429.585 million, so it is a big number.

The Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The number for 2020–21 is \$529.585 million.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: It is a big number. How much of that will be allocated to the prevention of placing children who are known to have been abused in the past being housed with other children or other perpetrators with a known history of sex abuse?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Can I just elaborate. It is a large number allocated to the care arrangements—just over \$400 million, nearly \$430 million, across the state for the coming financial year. I am not able to give a specific figure for how much will be allocated so that any child who has harmful sexual behaviours, has a conviction or has committed an offence is not housed with other children. I can give the member, as well as members of the public, an assurance that it is very much the priority for the department not to house or accommodate those children with any other children who are possibly at risk. I would like to say that would never be the case, but there are times, depending on the nature of that child's offence or their behaviours and the other residents, when they are put in a group home, for instance. That is the minority of children in care. It might even be in a foster carer situation when a judgement is made that the risks can be managed. Just looking at the policy—because I answered a question on it yesterday and because of the recent publicity it was fresh in my mind—and it says that a safety plan must be put in place if that situation does eventuate. I assure the member, as well as other members here, that that case would very much be the exception. We are very alive to the risks associated with managing over 5 000 children in care, many of whom have complex needs and a traumatic background. Whether they are harmful sexual behaviours, whether they are behavioural issues, whether those children have some sort of an impairment, they are very difficult matters to manage. The department does that day in, day out, to try to juggle conflicting demands.

I am trying not to be longwinded and I know I am not succeeding, but I am making the point that this is the day-to-day work of the department, and not only have we allocated a lot of money to making sure that there are safe placements for children, but we have put more money into the system, into the frontline work of child protection, to make sure that we are well resourced to do that. It is a constant challenge to properly house those children. In some cases, sadly—we are not the only state that does that—there will be cases in which children are put on a one-on-one situation with a carer, because that is the only safe environment to put them in—not necessarily because of harmful sexual behaviours, but because they might have behavioural issues or violent tendencies and that is the only way we can be assured of their safety. That is a very difficult situation; it is no place for a child in the long term. We work with specialists, professionals, child protection workers and partner agencies to look at the best environments for those children.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The deputy director general, Rachael Green, is mentioned in a recent *WAtoday* article saying that the department is committed to working with police with regard to Operation Timing Belt. Has the department allocated a staffing group or a team to try and focus on Operation Timing Belt, so that we can prevent the Macy situation from reoccurring?

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Ms S.F. McGURK: I was getting briefed on Operation Timing Belt, but there has not been a specific allocation of staff or people pooled, or of an extra allocation given in this budget so that that work can occur. That is not to say that the work will not occur. It will occur. We will work with the police, just as we have worked with them over in the west Pilbara or other places in the state to make sure that there is very much a joined-up approach to dealing with specific police operations, whether it is Operation Timing Belt or other police operations, in identifying risk and responding to that risk for children in care or identified or potential victims.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 527 of the *Budget Statements*, and service area 4, “Preventing and Responding to FDV”. I note that there has been an increase of funding in that area, partly due to the commonwealth funding flowing into the national partnership on COVID-19 domestic and family violence responses. In other areas we have seen a big uptake in the use of telehealth and telecommunications as a method of delivering service in health and mental health, for instance. Is the use of such services something being considered by the department under this increased funding?

[10.30 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is true that we have had an allocation from the federal government as part of its national response, particularly as a result of COVID, and that has been very welcome. Can I also say that as a state, we have put in significant new money. I think out of the \$28 million of additional funding as a result of COVID that we announced, about \$5 million was from the federal government, but the lion’s share was from the state government—so about \$23 million additional money has been put into responding to domestic violence.

To answer the member’s question, I am not aware of the equivalent of telehealth methodologies being used to respond to domestic violence, particularly during COVID. We have looked at innovative models in the past, and the member has probably heard me speaking about keeping women safe in their home, or safe at home, when this is where essentially the victims are—for instance, a woman and the children. A risk assessment is done, the decision is made that they can stay in their home and a safety plan is put in place. The perpetrator is then moved out. Violence restraining orders, all those things, are very much risk based, so it might not be safe for that occur, but it happens if it is safe. That is a model we have not only supported but also put additional funding into. I was frustrated when the federal government withdrew its funding. We have propped up some of its funding to that particular program, which has been on the decline. In any case, that is an example of different ways of doing things.

Also as a result of COVID, part of our response was to put new outreach people in the joint response teams throughout the state. There are 17 family violence joint response teams throughout the state. We have allocated an additional outreach or community service worker in each one of those 17 teams for two years, so that is a very practical resource. Also, there will be additional outreach workers given to the different women’s services throughout the state. That is an additional practical service on the ground.

I am laughing because just as I say one thing, I get a note from my advisers saying something quite different! It is always heartening, is it not, to get frank and fearless advice! That is good!

I was just speaking about the additional resources on the ground for the next two years. I know that that has been welcomed throughout the state, and sorely needed, sadly. I am advised that some of the FDV services do use video for some of their outreach, so that is a good thing. Obviously there are challenges, particularly in regional Western Australia, let alone remote areas. The move to telehealth-type services, whether it is video or phone, has been really welcome. Of course, sometimes it is dependent on connectivity, but we have been very alive to being prepared to be flexible to make sure that we are responding to the circumstances faced throughout the state.

Another example is the changes to how restraining orders can be served. One of the reforms in the family violence bill that was passed through Parliament was to try to make them more flexible for some regional areas—to take effect in regional areas.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am glad the minister reconsidered the fact that those sorts of services could be of value throughout that discussion that she just gave. I thank her for the answer. She acknowledged the challenges that some regional people may face through that. The reason I am asking this question is that I recently had a discussion with a person by the name of Fleur McDonald, who started up a program down in the Esperance area to assist people in this position. Recently, an organisation that she started up received funding through the federal government to provide services within 16 shires or districts within the state. I am wondering whether the state has been approached at any stage to roll out a similar service, or whether it would consider expanding that existing service—which is now funded by the commonwealth for those 16 districts—to roll that out across the rest of the state? I think there is a great deal of value in what they are offering, and as a regional person, I can see how they could actually assist many families in working through these types of issues and problems.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Can I just be clear that I was not dismissing the use of telehealth or video for FDV matters—not by any means. I was just saying I was not aware how much they were used.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have gathered that the minister had worked her way through that.

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Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, I was not saying they were not of value. I was trying to make the point, too, that I think we need to be open-minded and innovative about how we get good services to people throughout the state with our geographical challenges.

I am aware of organisation based in Esperance that that the member is speaking about. I am sorry, its name eludes me, but I am aware of it. One of our challenges in much of the community services sector is that people begin new ventures and then start to build up a whole program of work. We need to make sure that they are linked with other services and supports and have the proper expertise to do that work. That is the only qualification I would put on that request. We have requests for work to be done across the state in regard to domestic violence. There is a lot to be done; I have made that point many times. This is just in relation to crisis funding and proper supports. Where that crisis funding and those supports are in place, we need to make sure people have the proper expertise to do that work. That is very much what I am focused on if we are able to get new money. We have already put significant new money into domestic violence throughout the state and we will continue to do that—not only crisis money, but all along the continuum to make sure that perpetrators are held to account through the justice system and primary prevention. When we do have new money, there is some opportunity for the organisation that the member referred to. It might be Breaking the Silence. I am sorry, I cannot remember the name of the organisation. It might be called DV Assist.

Mr R.S. LOVE: DV Assist is the current —

Ms S.F. McGURK: The current name.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The federal government, yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: We want to make sure they have an opportunity to bid for those additional funds, and then that they have the proper expertise to undertake that work. I think they are doing some of that outreach work from Subiaco at the moment, so they have counsellors based in Subiaco doing that work to regional areas. We just need to make sure that they are properly linked in with different services throughout the state.

Mr R.S. LOVE: My understanding is that the federal government has provided them with a fairly good base to provide those services within the areas that I have mentioned—the 16 different districts. But I would suggest that that indicates that the federal government at least has confidence that they are linked into those types of service arrangements, and it could be a good model to consider rolling out. Using the architecture that they have already developed would seem to be more sensible than trying to reinvent the wheel in the future.

Ms S.F. McGURK: One of the challenges in any of this work is to make sure that people do not have a plethora of references or different groups to go to to get authoritative information. It concerned me a lot to hear that it might be that our mainstream DV information, online or by phone, was not accurate for people in regional areas. In fact, I do not think that is the case; I think it is very accurate. So I think we need to make sure that everyone has access to good information that is evidence-based, that people have the skills to do that work, but not taking away from other efforts. I do not have line of sight on what the federal government's funding arrangements are for any of those organisations. I do not know about that. That is up to them and between them. I think it was organised through the federal member Nola Marino, so I am not sure under what portfolio. But, in any case, it is good that they have federal money —

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think it is regional development.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is regional development, yes. I am not sure what their expertise is in regard to this particular subject area, but if we have extra money that is available, we will make sure that we look at all the different providers out there—they will have an opportunity to bid—and we will evaluate that as those opportunities come to hand.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I refer to page 521, under the list of items under “Other Significant Issues”, paragraph 19. The minister is obviously aware that there was an independently chaired functional review covering the agency's policies and corporate processes. The functional review arose out of the machinery-of-government changes. I wanted to find out, rather than the impact on the internals of the agency, what actual impact the outcome may have had on the delivery of frontline services.

[10.40 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: The department is committed to responsibly managing its budget—I hope it goes without saying—and it is very aware of its obligations to ensure that services are delivered to the community in an effective and efficient manner. As part of the budget process for 2020–21, the government identified improvements that could be made to ensure that the Department of Communities' budget is sustainable. As a result, there has been a functional review of Communities, with a focus on non-frontline functions, that will help shape the scope, scale

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and priority of the frontline activities. The functional review takes into account other workforce reform programs, such as the state disability services transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The process was recently commenced, and updates will be provided as part of the midyear review for this financial year, as well as the 2021–22 budget process. I hasten to add that the frontline operations are not scoped within the functional review, and frontline services to the WA community will not be impacted by the review. But I think, as the member reflected in his question, in order to effectively provide good frontline services, have line of sight on the effectiveness of those services and how they can be best supported, having good back-of-house functions is crucial.

Of course, as a result of the investigations leading to the arrest of Paul Whyte, there have been a range of improvements that have been made around the department that will not only, I think, give the public some comfort around safeguards that are in place that public money is being properly spent, but also that any possible misspends or corruption that has occurred in the past is properly dealt with.

In regard to the functional review, the department has improved governance, including through a new finance and investment committee, with an independent chair and members, as well as appointing an independent chair and independent members to the audit and risk committee. Some of those things such as the independent chair to the audit and risk committee had already taken place through the middle of last year. There has also been the appointment of a chief risk officer. I think that is important to note.

I also wanted to perhaps take this opportunity to speak about our annual report. There was a qualified opinion given by the Auditor General, and I think it might just be an opportunity to address some of those issues. I think, as I say, that it is important that the public has confidence in the Department of Communities in not only how it is managing large amounts of public money, but also how it is best placed to deliver good services to the public and to vulnerable members of our community.

In January this year, the Department of Treasury made changes to Treasurer's Instruction 304 as a result of the fraud allegations against Paul Whyte. These are mandatory changes that the Department of Communities has been implementing, and they were made across the whole of government. The changes required Communities to transition to a different finance system, as the existing system did not allow the department to update the new Treasurer's Instructions requirements. As the Auditor General's opinion is based on transactions occurring from January, there was a period during which the department was not fully compliant with the updated Treasurer's Instruction.

Deloitte was engaged to assist with the rollout of the new financial management across the department, addressing the new requirements of TI 304 and subsequent issues raised by the Auditor General. PricewaterhouseCoopers has also been engaged to assist with the development of forensic reports on transactional processes to strengthen the controls of the department. In October this year, the department's single payroll system was introduced, and this will address significant concerns raised by the Auditor General. Work is continuing in this area to implement further controls to address the other issues raised. The department has also implemented the TI 304 changes to strengthen procurement controls, such as mandatory three-way matching processes, which will commence in this financial year. As an interim measure, the department acted promptly on moving from its legacy Prophecy accounting system to Microsoft AX 2012.

The department has made significant progress in improving payroll and procurement controls, and continues to do more. The department is committed to becoming a public sector leader in governance, integrity and financial management control because it takes seriously its responsibilities in child protection, housing, disability, and family and community services.

That was, again, a little longwinded, but I thought it was important to put on the record the changes that have been put in place now—not about to be put in place, but have been put in place now—and which we believe, the department advises me, address all the issues raised by the Auditor General's qualified opinion. I think it was the first time we had had a qualified opinion from either the Department of Communities or any of its feeding agencies, in the case of Housing or Child Protection, over the preceding 10 years or so.

The CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Just before we go to further questions, I want to get a bit of guidance. Are members all happy to have a slight break at 11 o'clock?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I am happy to keep going.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I would appreciate a break.

The CHAIR: Minister, and her advisers—five minutes?

Ms S.F. MCGURK: I would not mind five minutes.

The CHAIR: Okay; we will go to 11 o'clock.

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Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The minister indicated that the system changes were made in January. My understanding—the minister can correct me if I am wrong—is that this audit report and the qualifications were done for the period between April to October, so well after January. The minister is saying that the system changes came into effect in January, and as late as October this year the Auditor General was still finding problems with both the procurement and payroll systems. I just wanted to get some clarification on that to make sure that —

Ms S.F. McGURK: Sorry, Chair. I think the member might be getting his financial years mixed up. I might ask the acting chief financial officer to answer the question.

Mr N. Wijayadasa: Thank you, member, for the question. In January, we starting implementing our controls. The auditors started doing their audit in April, on to October. But the way the audit is run is they look at it backwards, so they looked at it from July to March. Actually, they confirmed that for the majority of the year we were noncompliant because the fraud happened in November and the controls came after that. So, as at now, we have the controls in place, but since it is backwards looking, we got a qualified opinion because of that.

I do want to say that they did a review, and they said the numbers were fine, but our controls are weak, which we agree on, and we have worked towards rectifying that. But we have done a lot of work on our part to make sure that the numbers are accurate, and they were comfortable with that part.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The annual report also refers to the misuse of credit cards and the number of times there was a misuse of credit cards, the fact that there is still some outstanding expenditure from credit cards and that a number of people have been referred for disciplinary action. Has that been fixed as well? Has the department chased up the outstanding funds, and, more importantly, how was this allowed to happen?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Member, I did take the opportunity to speak about the annual report because I was asked a question about the functional review of the department and how that affected frontline services. I just thought it was important to put some of those things on the record. I am happy for the chief financial officer to answer this particular question because they have done some work, but this is estimates on the 2020–21 budget and the budget papers, so I think we all probably need to have some discipline about how we relate the questions to a line item in here.

[10.50 am]

Mr N. Wijayadasa: With regard to credit cards, Communities has three systems. Historically, we have been doing a lot of this on a manual basis. One of the first steps we did in November was to bring it onto one single platform and to run automated processes through it. We now use NAB's FlexiPurchase product the way it is supposed to be used. It has controls, warnings, red flags and all of the above. Previously, with Windows manual, the issue was that there were so many transactions, we could not really follow up. Now that it is automated, we actually get the red flags and we are following through. We are working through those controls so that when we start working through controls and implementing them, we actually start getting more alerts and we are starting to follow those through.

With regard to the credit card itself, there are breaches, which is the case even in my previous agency and wherever. They are small numbers we are just working through. Any big breaches, we are recovering the money. With the small breaches, at times we are taking action on the employee, or if it is a past employee, but recovering might be too expensive when we compare it with the cost of the money we are getting. For some, it could be like \$40, and going through a process will cost a lot more than that. There are a lot more actions, but we are following through and making sure we are closing it all, so we are in a much better position than what it was.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Can the minister now guarantee that the systems are effective and that there are checks and balances in place to make sure there will be no further breaches?

The CHAIR: Member for Carine, I think you are asking a really generic question there. I am not quite sure where it fits into a line item.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: There is a line item there that refers to machinery-of-government changes and efficiency and effectiveness of delivering services. It is actually within that paragraph 19.

The CHAIR: I understand it is within that.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Perhaps the member could ask the question of me, and we will consider how we will answer it.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Could the member for Carine just repeat the question? What page are we on?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is the same question that was asked previously on paragraph 19, which refers to a whole range of things, both functional review and machinery-of-government changes in delivering frontline services, and efficiency and effectiveness in prioritisation. It is a pretty all-encompassing paragraph actually. I just want to make sure, because of all the problems the department has had with the Corruption and Crime Commission and other

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investigations that have taken place, and failures, that the department is now functioning properly and we are not going to have any further failures of the department and money being misappropriated.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I just reiterate what I said before, and backed up by the acting chief financial officer, that in regard to the changes that have been put in place since the Auditor General's qualified opinion, or in the process, because that opinion was backward looking, in fact there are significant improvements to the systems that have been put in place in the department, and all of the areas that were identified in that qualified opinion. In fact, as the chief financial officer said, there were no concerns on the figures, on the numbers, and the finances of the department, and this was the first time that we had been given a qualified opinion by the Auditor General.

It would have been helpful, I have to say, if we had been given some of those qualified opinions previously, but this was the first time that we had been given one, and they have now been addressed. The system is in place. That is the best that we can do. It is the ongoing work of the agency to make sure that there are good systems and safeguards in place, and we are implementing not only the new standard for the public sector in regard to the Treasurer's Instructions, but also the work of Ernst and Young in its advice to the Public Sector Commission about systems that should be put in place across the public sector. Communities is working very hard and including some independent oversight of that within the department, so the two committees that I spoke about—the audit and risk, and the finance and investment committees—both have independent chairs and members.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I am going to stay around the same line item for a little bit longer. I notice that the government's election commitment was to reduce the senior executive service by 20 per cent when it was elected. I note that in answer to a question on notice from me, the minister said that in 2017–18 the government had 37 SES; in 2018–19 it had 38 SES; and in 2019–20 it had 40 SES. I am just wondering why the government's SES numbers are growing every year. How does that align with the government's promise to cut SES numbers by 20 per cent?

Ms S.F. McGURK: In regard to the senior executive service, the commitment given by Labor going into the 2017 election was across government. In terms of the commitment across government, I think that question is better put to the Premier as the minister responsible for the public sector. The department, as of June 2020, had 34 senior executive service officers, and effective as of 11 September 2020, the department had 31 senior executive service officers.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I was given an answer to a question on notice by the minister on 15 September 2020—so just recently—which indicated that the Department of Communities, in 2019–20, had 40 SES.

Ms S.F. McGURK: In 2019–20?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Yes. In 2019–20, it had 40; in 2018–19, it had 38; and in 2017–18, it had 37. It is a question on notice that the minister answered, so I am just wondering why the figures are now different from the ones that the minister answered on notice.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right. I cannot see that question, and I take the member at his word. Perhaps I could just have a look. But I think what the member is saying is that that is the full financial year for 2019–20.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Yes, that is correct.

Ms S.F. McGURK: There were 40 SES. I am saying that as at 30 June —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: No; that is 30 June.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I understand. That is right. So that was for the —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: That is 2019–20—30 June, yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right. For the financial year 2019–20, there were 40 SES. I am saying that as at 30 June 2020—as at that date—there were 34, so it has gone down.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: But is that not to 30 June as well?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No. That is for the full financial year; there were that many.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Okay.

Ms S.F. McGURK: As at 11 September 2020, there were 31. This is for the full financial year. As at 30 June, there were 34 senior executive service officers.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: With regard to the redundancies that the minister is going to be instigating, can she tell me how many redundancies there are going to be and which positions she is identifying for potential redundancy?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I might hand over, just while I source all my advice on this—I do know in broad terms, but I want to make sure that I give accurate information—to the chief financial officer, and then I can supplement that information if need be.

Extract from Hansard

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Mr N. Wijayadasa: Essentially, the redundancies that we intend to offer—in fact, all—are as part of disability services moving to NDIS. There were 380 earmarked right at the beginning in 2017. That was put on hold until the transition occurred. The transition is now going to be completed at the end of this year. As at now, we have about 260 redundancies left. We intend to offer that 260 because there will not be any funding for that next year because those services are moving across to the commonwealth, so we intend to offer 260. I think there are about 50 expressions of interest so we might have about 210 left to offer across our footprint.

[11.00 am]

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: With regard to staffing numbers at the department and the machinery-of-government changes, I noticed again another answer to a question on notice given by the minister on 11 August 2020 that stated that in 2017 there were 6 137 staff in the new megadepartment; in 2018, there were 6 155; in 2019, there were 6 387; and in 2020, there were 6 380. Just looking at the growing staff numbers in the Department of Communities every year since the Labor Party has been in government, I am just wondering how that equates with the machinery-of-government changes to make things more efficient and streamline services when the department's numbers continue to grow.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Well, as an example I gave up to 30 June this year, and since coming to government, from 2017 to 30 June 2020, the additional FTE in frontline child protection work. We make no apology about protecting those people who are doing frontline work, child protection work, as an example, from any of those cuts, and that continues to be our position. So there have been some increases on the ground in relation to that frontline work. Trying to make sure we manage good service delivery, efficiencies and a modern way of operating the department is a constant challenge and is the work of corporate supports for the department. Of course, we have had, during the pandemic, a need to make sure we could respond across the state—for instance, a lot of frontline work is done now in assisting people into quarantine, and assisting people to get back to communities in remote Western Australia was done by Department of Communities staff, so there has been an extra effort, particularly over COVID. But to answer the member's question, some of the frontline workers in the Department of Communities were protected against any redundancies, and in fact we have put more FTE into that frontline work. We will continue to do that and make no apology for it.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Members, I would like to suspend for five minutes to give everyone a comfort break.

Meeting suspended from 11.01 to 11.17 am

The CHAIR: Member for Carine, you are champing at the bit.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Thank you very much. I refer to page 525, "Community Services" and the line item "Total Cost of Service". In the estimates hearings yesterday for both Police and Health, it was indicated that the Department of Communities has a responsibility within the hotel quarantining regime. I just wanted to ask: what was the minister's responsibility within that regime as it currently stands?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I might hand over to the director general who, I think, is living and breathing this today.

Ms M. Andrews: Thank you. Yes. As the member would know, the state of emergency was activated in March, and then in early April a welfare management plan was activated. In my capacity as director general of Communities, I also then take on responsibilities as the state welfare coordinator. We then stood up the State Welfare Incident Coordination Centre, and the responsibilities around that, I will say, are wide, but it is very much a coordination function. In the context of this emergency, one of the welfare responsibilities does extend to providing welfare support to people who are in quarantine, and that can take many forms. It depends on the individuals and what their needs are. We are part of the hotline that has been set up, and we then, depending on what the requirements are, whether it is practical welfare in relation to some particular needs that an individual or family might have or it is some mental health and wellbeing support, we have the ability to activate those services. So welfare under the emergency management legislation is broadly around what we would expect in the moment of an emergency in regard to accommodation, food, immediate support services, that sort of thing. In the case of the hotel quarantine, most of the accommodation and food are being looked after, so services can extend to other matters that individuals might have. It might be people with disabilities requiring some additional supports and so on.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Once people leave and they get their account on their exit, does the department have anything to do with the payment of accounts and the collection of funds for payment of the hotel quarantine account?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will ask the director general to answer.

Ms M. Andrews: We have a responsibility at the front end of the process, which is in relation to assessing applications, but the State Health Incident Coordination Centre manages the actual requirement and decision-making around whether waivers are granted or not. We do an assessment and provide advice.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: So the department does an assessment of all cases in terms of payment waivers?

Ms M. Andrews: Applications for —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Application for payment waiver?

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The CHAIR: Sorry.

Ms M. Andrews: Yes. Sorry.

The CHAIR: Member for Carine, through the minister.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Applications?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes. The director general is saying that they make an assessment of people who make applications for waivers.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: How many assessments have been made since the department has taken on this role and how many have been recommended for waiver?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The hotel quarantine fee waiver assessments since 17 July 2020 to 16 October—so fairly current—are 1 813 received and 1 060 completed. Our fee waiver recommendations were, out of that figure, 609 for a full waiver; 209 for a partial waiver; 207, no waiver; and 35 of those applications were withdrawn. There are 378 applications still to consider.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: For the 609 who got a full waiver, how was that determination made? What process did the department go through and how many checks and balances did it go through to make sure that they qualified?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We are just making sure that we give the member accurate information. I do not think I have the criteria here. We did take advice and did look at some of the systems operating in other states, but I do not have the specific quarantine criteria here. I am sorry; I do not have the criteria here.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Can the minister provide, on notice, the criteria for the waiver assessments?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There is an opportunity through the normal parliamentary questions for that information to be given, and I am happy to consider that. I do not think it is particularly sensitive information.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Further to that, the minister does realise that that is not going to happen, because we have only three parliamentary sitting weeks left. If questions on notice go in for the first week, we will not be getting answers back within this Parliament if we go through that process. If the minister is happy to answer the question, she is happy to answer the question; if she is not happy to be transparent, then just say so, but it cannot go through the proper process.

The CHAIR: Member for Carine, I do not think the comment you just made is appropriate.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: But we cannot go through proper process.

The CHAIR: Yes. I am not —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The minister knows that.

The CHAIR: Member for Carine, I am going to call you to order for the first time. I think you were suggesting something about transparency.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Yes.

The CHAIR: It is appropriate for you to make commentary about getting the information, but I think you were extending that a bit further.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Okay.

The CHAIR: The minister has indicated that if you would like that information, you are to put a question on notice.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Can I also indicate that there are colleagues in the upper house who, I am sure, would be happy to ask those questions and who get them within a shorter period of time. But during the process of the next hour and a half, we will try to get the member that information here, because there is a criterion that is used as an assessment.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The minister indicated that of the applications that have been assessed, the department is currently waiving just over 80 per cent of applications, either completely or partially. I think some 60-odd per cent are being fully waived. I am just wondering how that equates with the Premier's statements that everybody is paying for their hotel quarantine. He keeps repeating that continually, but is the minister not providing him with these statistics so that he knows that most people are not actually paying for their hotel quarantine?

[11.20 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: The Premier is provided with this information and my recollection—that is all it is—is that when we said that people would pay for their hotel quarantine, we did say that there would be some hardship provisions that would be considered, that there would be some circumstances. We are happy to make that criteria available to the member, and we will undertake to do that before the end of the hearing. But, as I understand it, criteria have been adopted

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[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Wednesday, 21 October 2020]

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in other states. For instance, they have looked at an income limit—a family income limit below, say, \$60 000 a year whereby it would be considered that it would be difficult for people to pay for all or part of their hotel quarantine. That is an example. I am happy to try to get the member that criteria. But the majority of people are paying for their accommodation. I hasten to say that these were the applications. The waivers that I spoke about and the applications compared with the amount that was paid, they were the applications. So that is not all the people in quarantine; they are the people who made an application for hardship. A proportion of them did have their applications agreed; a proportion had their applications agreed in part, and a number were full rejections—not of all people in quarantine.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: With regard to that, does the department just take the information on face value that people provide in terms of their hardship or is there some process to investigate whether that hardship is genuine?

Ms S.F. MCGURK: My understanding is that there is a verification and that is partly why there is a backlog of applications that people want some evidence of the information that is given, for instance, of income levels, resources or circumstances, but, yes, the department does do its due diligence in advising the government that there should be a full or partial waiver for these fees.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Thank you.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Minister, 1 800 people indicated that they wanted to seek a waiver. How many people is that drawn from in terms of a pool of people who have gone through the quarantine process? Do we know that?

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Thank you, member. Since we had the policy of charging people? I do not have that information here, I am sorry. Our Department of Communities is just responsible for assessing the applications for a fee waiver.

Mr R.S. LOVE: When we are talking about a waiver, are we talking about a waiver of some of the fees that were paid retrospectively because the legislation backdated the fees, or are these waivers for fees going forward with hotel quarantine, and what is the process for a person when they enter the system, so to speak? Do they have to pay within a certain time or do they have to pay before they enter hotel quarantine? Could the minister just give us a bit of an understanding of the system in terms of the payment process for the people involved?

Ms S.F. MCGURK: I was just trying to get clarification on the back payment that the member was talking about—whether the policy was retrospective. That was not my recollection. I could be wrong, but it is not my recollection that any sort of retrospectivity applied. There was an announcement by government that hotel fees would apply from a certain date, and from that announcement, hotel fees would be recouped from a certain date, and then the legislation would be backdated to that announcement, not —

Mr R.S. LOVE: I would consider that retrospective legislation.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: I am sorry, yes. But it certainly was not since we have been putting people into hotel quarantine.

Mr R.S. LOVE: No. Just for clarity, my question refers to the announced date and the fact that people would have already paid. I guess they have paid; I do not know. I am not sure about the process. How long do they have to pay? Is there a period of time before they are billed? What actually happens?

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Our agency is not involved in collecting the information from those —

Mr R.S. LOVE: So it does not collect it; it just authorises the waivers.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: We make the assessment on the fee waiver, either in full or in part, and those are the statistics that I have given the member.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Okay; thank you.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I refer the minister to two items in the budget. The first one is on page 523 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. On page 523 is the service summary table. Line item 6 is “Care Arrangements and Support Services for Children in the CEO’s Care”. I note that the actual spend for 2019–20 was \$466.023 million and the budget estimate for 2020–21 is \$429.585 million. That appears to be a drop of \$36.438 million. That is a significant drop. I noticed that drop and another drop on page 518 of the budget papers under “Spending Changes”. The fourth line item, “Children in Care Initiatives”, also has a drop from \$4.404 million down to \$306 000. These are significant falls. I also refer the minister to page 521. At the top of the page of 521 it says —

Over the past year, the total number of children in care has increased from 5,379 to 5,498 ...

So why the drop in spending when it appears that the demand is increasing?

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Thank you, member, for the question. Can I just take those line items that the member referred to one at a time? One is in regard to page 523 that referred to the sixth line item.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: It is \$429.585 million.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: I understand the point the member is making. The decrease largely reflects a spike in spending due to demand for services, which resulted in increased expenditure, including for frontline staff and some other

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costs, particularly regarding the complexity of children's needs. Additionally, costs were incurred as a result of civil litigation claims for historical child sex abuse. The member would be aware that we removed the statute of limitations, so there have been some costs associated with that, and also with the department's response to COVID-19. Costs increased by an estimated \$28.3 million as a result of those three items.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Is the minister attributing that \$36.438 million drop to the three things she just mentioned?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, that is right. I will just go to the other points the member raised.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: That was the children in care initiatives.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, that is right. That is on page 518. The children in care initiatives funding provides additional relief to carers of children in care, families who might be at risk of having children placed in care and to mitigate against the impacts of COVID-19. This funding indicates the one-off payment to carers for the 7 358 children in care to address additional expenses associated with people keeping children safe and healthy during the pandemic. Carers received a one-off payment of \$500 for the first child in their care and \$250 for each additional child in their care. So that was foster carers, special guardianship orders, and the grandcarers who are registered under our grandcarers support scheme. There were also payments to do with additional therapeutic support and consultation support for carers to provide support to carers during this time, and Aboriginal family-led decision-making pilot over the two years to support and improve collaboration. I have referred to that in Parliament. There is additional money in there for the Aboriginal family-led decision-making pilot.

[11.30 am]

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Is the drop of \$4.098 million because all those things the minister just listed cost \$4.098 million?

Ms S. McGURK: They are one-off initiatives. The \$3.769 million is for the one-off payment to foster carers and grandcarers, and \$316 000 of that amount is for additional therapeutic support and consultation for carers. Over two years, from memory, just over \$700 000 is for the Aboriginal family-led decision-making pilot. All those things are one-off initiatives.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Thank you.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to service 4 on page 527, preventing and responding to family domestic violence. The table presented there has an efficiency indicator with the average cost per family domestic violence case. We can see a significant increase in the actual amount and the budgeted amount in 2019–20 from \$3.116 million last year to \$4.980 million this year. I also refer to the notes to that table that show that the number of cases in 2018–19 that were dealt with was 15 996 and the number budgeted to be dealt with this year is 15 300. I note that the significant issues impacting the agency talk about an expected additional demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. I am wondering why the budget does not expect an additional number of cases, given that one of the significant issues outlined is the expected increase in family and domestic violence cases. Why has the minister actually budgeted for a decrease of those cases and is that extra income per case a little bit misleading?

Ms S. McGURK: No. The assumptions based in there—and certainly the dollars allocated—are not misleading. I have said publicly, and I am happy to say again, that there has been an increase in spending by us in regard to FDV. But the assumptions in regard to the number of cases in there for the coming year are partly in relation to the challenges we have got with FDV. On the one hand, the more we speak about domestic violence, the more we want people to come forward, and that is partly what the member is talking about. We actually want people to come forward and report, but obviously we are doing quite a bit of work to prevent domestic violence from occurring in the first place. In fact, during the pandemic, in the hook-ups that we have had nationally with my equivalents in other states and with the federal ministers responsible, we have seen very inconsistent data. In some measures we have seen increases; for instance, we saw an increase in the number of people coming to police, but in other cases we saw less reporting or fewer calls to helplines, but then that would be reversed. We were concerned that during the pandemic, we had people isolated at home and not able to reach out for help. The challenges of the assumptions within the budget of how many cases we are measuring are not an optimistic figure or a projection. In fact, they are really based partly on the agreements with the federal government. Some of the assumptions are based on that. The National Affordable Housing Agreement and the women's safety packages are some of the feeder agreements that have been put in place. Sorry, member, I am just making sure that I have the proper advice on this particular point. I might ask Mr Richardson to address that question, but I am advised that reaching those figures is not easy because, as I have said, just even in this year during COVID we have received inconsistent or varying messages from the different helplines and reporting mechanisms, such as police reporting, and the like. In any case, partly we are informed by some of the information that the federal government gives us through our federal partnerships with the homelessness agreement and the Keeping Women Safe in their Homes funding that we receive. I do not know

whether I could ask Mr Richardson if he wants to give us any more clarity on how we arrive at those figures in terms of the number of cases.

Mr M. Richardson: Thank you, minister. Just to hopefully expand on the point the minister is making, it is very difficult to project the number of cases, but they are based on the trends that we are seeing and the contracts we have with different service providers. It is important to remember that there is an existing level of funding that runs through a lot of the family and domestic violence services provided by the agency, and it is from those that we derive and expect a core number of services to be provided. In addition, this year, as the minister talked about, we are seeing a significant increase both in state and commonwealth funding for extra FDV services. Some of those are expected to deal with an increase in the number of cases, unfortunately, as a result of COVID-19 leading to higher instances of family and domestic violence. It is difficult for us to project what those might be, but also a lot of that funding relates to better coordination and support to supplement those existing services. Some of the new initiatives we are seeing include a job retraining scheme for women who have, unfortunately, experienced family domestic violence, to help them become more financially independent. We have seen an increase in counselling and financial counselling for people who, unfortunately, have undergone family domestic violence, so that is more at the tail end rather than just the intervention side, but it also includes the recovery side.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am still trying to come to an understanding. I think the question is still there: are we expecting an increase in family and domestic violence or not because of the COVID situation? I think the minister touched upon that in her response. If we are, why is there no serious attempt to try to quantify it, because it is actually a drop in the total number of cases? What concerns me is that we are not getting—well, maybe the minister is getting the true situation; maybe the process is working on reducing some of those instances, but I am not sure. It seems counterintuitive when the government is announcing a package to deal with an increased number of cases and yet the budget allocation seems to be showing a decrease in the number of cases.

Ms S. McGURK: I take the member's point. I think that our experience, particularly with domestic violence, is that it is very difficult to project exactly what is going to occur. As I said, the metrics of success with domestic violence is very difficult. We want incidents to go down but we want reporting to go up, as I have said before. The assumptions about what is going to occur are notoriously difficult to pin down. To get the settings right and to make sure that we have good data collection to provide a good evidence-based analysis of what is occurring on the ground is part of what we are doing. We are working in partnership with Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, which is the national research body looking at domestic violence, on not only the feeders of domestic violence, but also how to respond to it. I think it is also worth pointing out that we have invested very heavily on early intervention and family support in our child protection areas. The reality for those families is that domestic violence will often be a characteristic of some of that work. Some of the early indications about investments in early intervention and family support is starting to look quite promising. The trend for children coming into care is starting to reduce and we are getting better outcomes, so we are also hoping that that will feed into a more effective result. But I hasten to say that the numbers in the budget are assumptions about how many people we can expect to be serviced by this, and the challenge of pinning down those numbers is not particular to Western Australia.

[11.40 am]

Mr R.S. LOVE: This may be a question or a comment, but I guess the thrust, or the importance, of the distinction between whether or not the government is planning for an increase in numbers is that it surely must influence where it would put services. If the government is expecting a vast amount of the same old, same old happening, it would put services in to address that pinch point or that crisis situation. Whereas what the minister has been talking about throughout the response is more of a qualitative response to the situation and dealing better with the situations that do occur. I would have thought that planning for and providing resources to meet those two situations are somewhat different. It seems to be a little bit of a conflict in the wording around some of the descriptions of what the COVID package is there to fund and what is actually happening on the ground. I am a bit confused about it.

Ms S. McGURK: I will just make a couple of comments about that. In having funding agreements with the federal government, whether that is for the women's safety package or the housing and homelessness agreement, in being clear with Treasury and our service providers about what we expect, we do underpin that by assumptions of what is going to happen with cases. But the reality of something like domestic violence and those sorts of social phenomena is that they are not actuarial exercises. There is no hard-and-fast rule about what is going to occur, and shining a light on what is occurring with domestic violence has been part of our effort. Getting better data and understanding the extent of the problem is part of our strategic work. As well as the homelessness strategy, we also released a domestic violence strategy called Path to Safety. That is also important for understanding how this is looking in different parts of our state and how we can respond to it.

The assumptions that are made in the budget papers, which is partly what the member is talking about, for the COVID prevention of FDV—the prevention money that we put out—is to decrease the number of cases. That is some of the early intervention work that we are doing generally but we are also making sure that there are extra supports out there.

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Mr Richardson spoke about job readiness, for instance, to lift women out of financial dependency on an abusive partner, current or future. It is also about sustaining those extra dollars to support cases during recovery at the end of the process, not just at the point of crisis intervention. They are some of the things that we are trying to do in our response to domestic violence. There are assumptions in the budget on the number of cases. I think I have indicated that they are difficult to pin down because of the nature of domestic violence, which is that it is underreported.

Mr D. PUNCH: Thank you. I refer to the line item “Respectful Relationships” on page 538 in the table of details of controlled grants and subsidies. Can the minister please outline how this investment across the forward estimates is indicative of the broader work in the prevention of family and the domestic violence portfolio and how it complements the government’s broad reform agenda in this important area?

Ms S. McGURK: Thank you, member. We have spoken in this hearing, and also heard from the Prime Minister and the Premier, about a lot of observations about the effect the pandemic would have on domestic violence and whether it would give perpetrators an additional opportunity to exercise control and violence in all its forms on their victims. We were very aware of this early on in the pandemic and, as we have just demonstrated, we have tried to work with the service sector and gather the best evidence of how we can respond to that across the state. Often the conversation about domestic violence is crisis driven; it is responding to an emergency. We need to get that right and put in proper supports not only during the crisis, but also in the longer term to make sure that we are keeping women safe, keeping their children safe and keeping the victims safe while also lifting them out of a situation where they might be exposed in the future.

We also need to prevent this violence from happening in the first place. That is a community challenge. One of our election commitments in 2017 was to agree to sign on to Our Watch, which is the national primary prevention body. At the time, WA had not signed on to that. Now all states have signed on to Our Watch. That is a program, or an effort, that understands that this is a long game. We use a health behavioural change lens to try to look at how we can alter community attitudes to violence against women and children, and domestic violence in particular. We agreed to sign on to Our Watch and we also committed to implementing respectful relationships teaching support in WA schools. We allocated \$1 million to that, and that has been rolled out in a number of schools across the state. That is where schools can put their hand up and say, “Yes, we want to be part of this program.” Supports are given to teachers to alter existing teaching programs. They are not new programs or new subjects that are given, but they are a tool that is used to alter the existing curriculum. We have been working our way through that. Schools are part of our work of primary prevention to change attitudes, but we all have a role to play in this. In not too long—in October or early November—we will be starting on 16 Days in WA. That will be the fourth time we have done that as a state government. That is an opportunity for all of the community, whether elected representatives, businesses, community or sporting organisations, or members of the public to step up and say, “Yes, we consider domestic violence and violence against women to be unacceptable”, and to raise awareness about what we can all do.

We are trying to work across all of those areas: emergency responses; keeping victims safe; systemic changes so that all our different systems are talking to each other in a joined up way; looking at long-term support for people affected by violence so that they get themselves on their feet and then look at addressing some of the drivers that may have led to them being in abusive relationships, where that is an issue; holding perpetrators to account; and making sure that there is law reform but also primary prevention. That is very much what we are alive to.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Note 1 at the bottom of page 526 talks about the extension of contracts to provide funding surety. I refer to the minister’s media statement on 4 October 2018 in which she indicated that contracts would be given for five years into the future. My question is: since 4 October 2018, how many contracts have been extended for the five-year period and how many have been extended for a lesser period of one year?

Ms S. McGURK: Thank you, member. I am just trying to make sure —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: That is all right. Find that, because in that announcement the minister indicated that the policy recommends a minimum five-year contract, which will ensure that sector organisations have greater funding security.

[11.50 am]

Ms S. McGURK: Yes, I am very aware of the policy and of our commitments around that. In fact, this was one of the commitments that we made before the last state election and was very welcomed by community services organisations. We have been working very hard to roll that out as quickly as possible. I will say a couple of things. In relation to COVID, there were particular challenges because a number of service agreements were due to expire in June. We were worried that because of the COVID disruption that occurred in 2020, and continues to occur, that would cause significant disquiet and interruption to service delivery if we were to proceed with the reissuing of contracts in June and so a number of contracts were extended so that organisations could continue to work uninterrupted.

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That is the first thing. There has also been a challenge, or a tension if you like, in moving to a five-year contract delivery because in order to do that, if a service needed to be redesigned or reconsidered regarding who was able to tender for that service, that would take work. There was a tension about whether to hold off recontracting because back-of-house work was required to make sure that it got done properly. They have been the tensions, but wherever possible we have been moving to five-year contracts. The Department of Finance advice, which was bulletin issue 82, is in fact the issue that I was raising before about COVID. It said that the contracts that were due to cease in 2020 would be extended for 12 months. I said 2021, I am sorry; it should be agreements ceasing in 2020. The Department of Finance said to just give people another 12 months.

There is also tension when the contract needs to be redesigned or who is involved in the contract needs to be changed. That creates tension because simply moving to a five-year contract all the time would mean that some service providers would not be able to apply for funding. To answer the member's question about the number of contracts, the 190 agreements within the Department of Communities were extended to 2021 as a result of COVID. There are a large number of contracts. I am just seeing if I have got it. A large number of contracts were entered into by the Department of Communities, so I am not able to give the member a figure today on how many, since coming to government, have moved to a five-year contract within the Department of Communities, but I can assure the member that it is still our policy and we are working very hard to not only implement it, but also implement it across government in partnership with the not-for-profit sector.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: When will these 190 organisations, or service providers, know whether or not they will still be in existence at the end of this 12-month extension? The minister has obviously indicated that a lot of work needs to be done as to who is going to be in and who is going to be out. What surety can they have that within the next 12 months the minister will move to five-year minimum contracts for all service providers, or is the minister planning on doing this at some time in the future?

Ms S. McGURK: The member asked at the beginning of the question whether those organisations will know that they will continue to exist at the end of the 12-month extension. I assume, depending on the size of the organisation, that the organisations will be in existence. The member wants assurance about the funding. I just referred to the 190 contracts that were due to expire in June this year. I said 2021, but 2020 is correct. I can assure the member that there is a default duration of five years for any contracts that are entered into by the community with the state government in the human services sector. That is the default. But they are not uniform contracts. Some of them, by their nature, are one-off or time-limited projects. The member for Churchlands asked me before about a couple of line items where we had given, for instance, funding for a trial for an Aboriginal family-led decision-making pilot. We are not committing to ongoing funding. That is a two-year trial; that is all we are funding it for. In that instance, that is all that will be contracted. It will not be contracted for five years. But where there is ongoing work, the default is for five years. It is not possible, considering the hundreds of contracts that are entered into by the Department of Communities, for me to say how many have been transferred to five years. With the Department of Finance, we have now negotiated. A few years ago, the Minister for Finance and I put out a public media release at an event. That is now state government policy and the default is for five-year contracts, which has been welcomed.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: At the end of 12 months, with these extensions, if some of these organisations have been delivering their services for a long time and are going to continue into the future, can the minister guarantee them, irrespective of the department's ability to get on top of the assessments that need to be done, that they will continue on a five-year contract if, within 12 months, they are not time limited from the point of view of a specific project, but are an ongoing service?

Ms S. McGURK: That is certainly my hope. I know that in his position as an opposition member, he would like me to give a categorical yes or no. I know that people get frustrated —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is not me; it is them.

Ms S. McGURK: That is right. They understand that there are times when they agree that we need to take time to refine or put improvements into the contract. To put it into perspective, the one-year COVID extensions, which is what I referred to before—the 190 contracts—represent a total value of \$12.7 million compared with Communities' overall contracting, which is for contracts, worth over \$250 million. The vast majority of those have longer agreements and where they are up for renegotiation, it is our default to have five-year contracts. That is something that we have worked very hard to implement across government.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: With the 190 contracts that were extended, was any additional funding given to them with regards to the equal remuneration order requirements, or were they just required to cut services to fit within the new financial regime that they have to operate in?

Ms S. McGURK: I will get my notes on the ERO, but there was no reduction in funding for the extension. There were no cuts, so that is important.

Extract from Hansard

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Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Sorry, I did not mean a reduction, but were they given more money? Obviously, they have to pay their staff a lot more, which means that they have to cut their services because they have to fit within their budget and their budget means they can do less because, obviously, they are paying wages at a higher rate. Did the minister recalibrate their funding to allow them to deliver the same service based on the ERO requirements?

[Mr T.J. Healy took the chair.]

The CHAIR: Minister.

Ms S. McGURK: Thank you, Chair. It is nice to see the member for Southern River in such a nice coloured shirt as well.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Hear, hear!

[12.00 noon]

Ms S. McGURK: There are two increases that we have given to accommodate the ERO requirements. One was for \$1.9 million for the 56 eligible 24/7 National Housing and Homelessness Agreement services and we also provided \$58 million for a number of agencies. In total, that was for 265 contracts across government agencies, but 176 of those contracts were related to the Department of Communities. We have allocated extra money, and I think that has been made public previously. I can assure the member of the extension. Of course, we have made an adjustment to the indexation measure under this government. That is a more generous calculation of the indexation adjustment that was made by the Department of Finance under our government compared with the previous government.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The minister said that the ERO was applied to 176 contracts. How many contracts in total does the department actually have with the not-for-profit sector?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you, member. I am sorry, but I do not have that figure. I gave the member a broad dollar amount here. I will see, as we are speaking, whether we have here the total number of contracts. I gave a figure of about 250.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: My gut feeling is that it is around 400 to 500.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am advised that it is 714. That is across all services. It is not just my portfolio, obviously; as the lead minister, it is across all services—over 700.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Of those 714, 176 have had adjustments for an equal remuneration order. Am I to assume then that the other 500-odd have had no adjustments based on ERO requirements?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, the member cannot assume that. Equal remuneration orders are in place as a result of a decision of Fair Work Australia, and there were contracts that were entered into prior to the ERO announcement being made, and so those contracts did not have capacity. Those organisations had not built the ERO higher salary components into their contracts, so they are vulnerable in ERO increases. I think the last increase might be in December this year, as a result of ERO decisions, and will be staged in for various classifications.

Different categories of organisations or contracts have been affected by EROs. For instance, if a person entered into a contract after the decision by Fair Work was made in 2012, they would be able to factor in higher wages or salaries because they would know what their salary was going to be for that period of time. In the majority of cases, new contracts would be entered into or retendered. But I understand that some organisations did not have an opportunity to factor those higher wages into their contracts, and they are the ones we have tried to accommodate in the additional payments.

I will also mention that the previous government under Premier Barnett gave a large amount of money—\$600 million—to the sector. I remember I was working for UnionsWA at the time. I think I was secretary of UnionsWA. The union was concerned that it was not clear how that \$600 million was going to be allocated by those organisations and there would be no accountability publicly of how that money was being spent and there would be confusion. The Department of Finance or the contracting agency did not spend time making clear how that \$600 million was to be spent. We have been vindicated in that view because years later, we have Finance or Treasury saying, “Well, you were allocated money under the previous government—\$600 million. You’ve already been given money for that”, and the organisations are saying, “We weren’t given enough”, or, “No, that is not what the money was for.” We have taken the time to be very clear in understanding those organisations that have, for instance, 24/7 staffing requirements that are very vulnerable to wage increases. They have penalties and 24/7 obligations, and the services are required. We have tried to take all of that into account. Having said that, I understand there was still tension in the sector. I am aware of that, and we are continuing to work with it to make sure that people are paid fair wages and that the sentiment under the equal remuneration order is honoured; that is, the community sector largely employs women, who are often not well remunerated for the skill and effort that they put in day in and day out in the community services area.

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Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The minister would be aware of the suspension of standing orders motion that we did back in June, asking about domestic violence counselling advocacy and support services. I will not ask the minister to name the 18 organisations that were part of that, because I am sure that she would struggle and need to read the list, just as I did. I want to know whether they have received any additional funding, which they were requesting, as part of the ERO process so that they can deal with domestic violence issues, because, as the minister would be aware, they were talking about cutting services.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I know the member will be pleased to hear that they did under the COVID recovery package—the \$28.2 million that we announced as part of the overall COVID recovery package. Some of that money went to domestic violence advocacy services.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is good that the minister changed her mind.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have a list of the 18 organisations. Does the member want me to take time reading them out?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: No; I have the list here as well.

The CHAIR: Member, I was waiting for the minister to finish her reply, then I will come back to a further question, if you would like.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I would the minister to list them without reading from the list. I would like to see whether she could do that!

Ms S.F. McGURK: We allocated \$1.08 million to the counselling and advocacy services for the two years, 2020–21 and 2021–22. That is \$540 000 per annum.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: How much were the organisations actually looking for to be able to continue to deliver the services at the same level that they were prior to 30 June?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It was that amount.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It was that amount, so were they given exactly what they wanted?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Okay; that is good.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I refer to page 529 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the table headed “Care Arrangements and Support Services for Children in the CEO’s Care”.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Just give me a second.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: In reference to the explanation of significant movements, the third note says that the increase in cost reflects —

... an increase in the number of young people with complex needs who were not able to be placed safely in existing care arrangements, driving increased costs for interim arrangements while longer-term options were developed.

Why were these young people unable to be placed safely in the existing care arrangements?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I thank the member for the question. It is a challenge in estimates to listen to the question and then be trying to look for the answer at the same time. Did I understand correctly that at the end of his question, the member asked why these children were not able to be placed in safe arrangements?

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Yes. I asked why these young people were unable to be placed safely in the existing care arrangements.

[12.10 pm]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you, member. This area of placing children with complex needs in our child protection system is one of the most difficult. I remember speaking about this particular matter in the last estimates hearing. They will be children with difficult behaviours, either an impairment—for instance, FASD—but some sort of cognitive impairment, behavioural issues, maybe harmful sexual behaviours. There might be any number of issues, and that makes them very difficult to place. Foster care placements breaking down is very difficult for the children because then they have to be upended and moved somewhere else. It is very difficult for the carers, too. I do not think anyone pretends otherwise. The work of the department, the different districts and some of our senior staff here is to support the carers and to support those children, with professional supports, to make sure that those placements are as stable as possible, and, by and large, that occurs.

In 2019–20, programs for dealing with children with complex needs, high-needs placements, delivered services to a total of 262 children and young people with high complex needs. Some of those children have a moderate to severe

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disability, as I said, or extremely complex and challenging behaviours. The services—just to understand how that is broken down—might be transitional high needs, disability placement and support, and specialised fostering. As of June 2020, there were 201 children and young people in specialised care arrangements. As of the end of the financial year, 30 were in transitional high needs, 75 in disabilities placement and support, and 98 in specialised fostering. I can give some of the dollar amounts. I do not know whether that answers the member's question.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The minister has given me some stats, which is good. Can the minister give an indication of what these interim arrangements look like? I kind of understand what they might look like for someone with a disability because, obviously, they need to have a certain style of home and somebody who is able to care for the child with a disability. What other types of care arrangements is the minister talking about—I mean, in terms of what does it physically look like? Are they in some sort of institutional care or are they all in foster care? Where are they put?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is a combination of those two things. I might see whether Deputy Director General Rachael Green wants to address some of these issues. Sometimes young people or children will be put into interim foster care arrangements. For instance, if their placement breaks down, they may go into interim foster care arrangements while a more stable solution is found for them. Those children might be put into group homes to try to settle them.

For instance, when I was in Broome recently, I visited one of the group homes that has children with very complex needs. That group home's name eludes me at the moment, but it was really heartening to see the work that it was doing at that time with two girls, and the challenges associated with those two girls in that home.

In fact, as a quick aside, when I was in Broome, I was really pleased to meet a young man who this year is head boy at Broome Senior High School. He had previously been a resident at that group home, which is an indication that he would have had complex needs. He would have had high needs, but he had set himself some goals early in high school, and he had worked with Clontarf and some of the other service providers. He had decided that he wanted to be head boy, and he had become head boy. I met him and had a cup of tea with him and spoke to him. That is an example of when some of those supports are put in place at the right time, we get really good outcomes. Sometimes, depending on where that young person is at, progress can be relative to how they might progress. I might get Rachael Green, the assistant director general —

Ms M. Andrews: Deputy director general.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Deputy director general—I always get that wrong. I will get her to supplement that answer, just to give the member an idea of the sort of supports that are put in for some of those young people with complex needs.

Mrs R. Green: Thank you, member, for the question. Absolutely, it is a significant increase in our spending over the last financial year, and it has been a difficult year. But particularly, the increase was around young people. We have a range of different placements, but the costs are particularly related to the individual young person. The minister has already mentioned this morning the challenges of young people, particularly around their behaviours. When we are actually looking to place a young person, it is not necessary that there is the availability. Indeed, it might not be a long-term placement, in which case it might be relatively short term.

Sometimes the agencies that we work with do not actually have the staff that are suitably skilled to be able to provide services to our young people, and therefore the costs escalate on the basis that they need to train their staff, as well as the complexity. It might be, as the minister mentioned this morning, that it is not actually a one-to-one service; it might be two staff to one young person. Again, that also exacerbates the costs. It is double-edged. First, it is the number of young people, but also, second, it is the availability of placements and the cost, which escalates.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Minister, are any of these group homes or placement options or care arrangements purpose built?

Ms S.F. McGURK: My understanding is that most of them would be, or there would be a combination of both. They might have been adjusted over time to make sure that they were appropriate for a group home environment. I have visited many of them. But again, just because of the nature of our capital exercise, I am advised that few of them are purpose built. There are times, with women's refuges, for example, when we are very alive to the fact that we need to make sure that our facilities are suitable for the cohort that we are dealing with.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: In light of the fact that the government acknowledges in the budget an increase in the number of young people with complex needs and that has caused the increase in cost, what is it allocating in the budget to group home facilities to cater with this increasing number of young people with complex needs?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I think the question the member is asking is about the capital expenditure in regard to group homes, for instance, and the like. That is something that is taken up by the department with Treasury as we need to increase the capacity of our system. Whenever possible, we would try to place children in a foster care environment

in a family home. That is our preference. I do not have the figure in front of me, but the vast majority—I recall it is over 70 per cent—of our young people are placed in foster care arrangements and proper supports are in place. If there is a need to build a new facility, for instance, that would be taken up at the time in a budget bid by the department with Treasury.

A similar point could be well made about women's refuges around the state. I am very conscious of the state of many of our women's refuges and safe houses around the state, and I think people will be very pleased to see the new facilities that we are building in Peel and Kwinana, which are self-contained units, for instance, but still with proper security and oversight. Where we can, we are trying to build in not only new capital, but also different ways of care in women's refuges. We are also dealing with young people to make sure that the facility is both safe and therapeutic for them.

Anyway, to answer the member's question, that would be taken up with Treasury by Communities if need be.

There were challenges during the COVID pandemic in terms of the movement of children, for instance, and children being able to have contact visits and the like. There were all sorts of challenges. I have also talked about the frontline staff; that is, the extra FTE that will be available for the number of children with complex needs. I think the extra FTE for the cost-and-demand model will mean that staff are able to be allocated to do that work. For the increase in the number of children in care in 2019–20, the existing care arrangements were not available. But where we have been able to safely, we have put children in more temporary arrangements while longer term capacity was increased. Those longer term options are now available, which is reflected in the reduced average cost in 2020–21. That is the average costs reflected in the budget papers.

[12.20 pm]

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The last part of that quote I referred to talked about the interim costs for interim arrangements. The minister has spoken of those. The paragraph goes on to say “while longer-term options were developed.” Can the minister help us understand how much of the budget has been allocated to developing these longer term options by her department, and what those longer term options look like?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am just getting some advice to make sure that I am not barking up the wrong tree. I think it is an opportunity to talk about the specialist child protection unit that we are developing within the department under the new structure. Part of the establishment of that specialist unit within the Department of Communities is to make sure not only that child protection has its proper and senior place within the department to give good, specialist advice up to senior levels, to the director general and her executive team, but also that we have good support in place for the districts and the work on the ground with our partners. That specialist unit will have an outward focus as well to look at how other jurisdictions are managing these children with complex needs and how we can draw on best practice from not only around the country, but also around the world for some of these children of trauma, and a compromise for the reasons in their short lives, the other reasons that we have spoken about. At the moment, we are developing that specialist unit within the department's existing budget.

I think it will also assist us to look at good models of how to deal with children with complex needs. I am very aware of our responsibilities to not only those children but also, frankly, their carers and the community around caring for those children. Sadly, we see cases of those children running away, to use a common expression. They will just simply leave their placements. People ask, “How can that be? Aren't you responsible? Why aren't you managing these children?” As any parent knows, if a child really wants to leave the house, they will leave the house. Their parents can lock them up. That might be an alternative a parent could choose to adopt, but I am sure they would do that as a last resort. When possible, that absolutely is our last resort, and we have the Kath French Secure Care Centre. Managing children and young people with complex needs is core work for the department, making sure that we have the right physical infrastructure, making sure that we have the right partners in foster carers, support for those partners, whether it is foster carers or our community sector organisations that we work with. A number of those manage some of those group homes and some of the foster care arrangements. But it is also making sure that we have kind of best practice, with looking at models and interventions. I have visited other states since being minister, and that has been very much part of my conversations with other jurisdictions, New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, and also New Zealand, to understand how they work with these children to get good outcomes.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: When does the minister expect that these long-term options will be in place?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Member, I do not think it will be a case of finding a set-and-forget system. We are continually looking at how to not only put in place alternative arrangements around the state, but also evaluate those and if necessary shift our approach. Making sure that we have culturally appropriate options available for young people is also part of what we need to do. I know the member participated in a bill that is before the Parliament looking at the Children and Community Services Act and how we make decisions about the right placements for those young people that are culturally appropriate. Getting the balance right, making sure that those young people can stay

connected to their culture and their community and their country, but at the same time keep them safe, is something that is sometimes a very finely balanced exercise that we have to bring our best effort to. That is partly what is being considered in the amendments to the child placement principle that is before Parliament at the moment.

So to answer the member's question, I do not see this as a set-and-forget system, but that is also our intention. Our objective is to have not only good therapeutic supports, but also stable supports and a safe and secure environment for those young people. Stability is absolutely core to that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Minister, I refer to page 524, the outcomes table and the outcome "Children and young people in the CEO's care receive a high quality of care and have much improved life outcomes". I refer to the line item "Proportion of Aboriginal children in the CEO's care placed in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle" and the fact that the budget target is considerably higher in the last year than the achieved target. Again, it is a budget target at 80 per cent, when I think the department is achieving just under 65 per cent at the moment. What are the barriers that the minister sees that need to be overcome, to ensure that placements take place in accord with the placement principle, which I understand is that children go to either extended family within their own communities or to other Aboriginal families elsewhere in the state? Why is it so hard to achieve a growth in this area? I might ask the minister some more questions depending on the answer.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you, member. The member made a good point about why the target is consistently higher than what we have been able to achieve, although we do have a slight increase. By national standards, we do not do too badly, with two-thirds of those Aboriginal children being placed in accordance with the principle. But to be fair, each state has its own circumstances, including the number of Aboriginal carers who are available, geographical challenges and the like. It is difficult sometimes to make good comparisons across the country.

It is absolutely our intention and our ambition to increase the number of children who are placed in accordance with the principle. In part, the adjustments that we are making to the act that I just referred to are about making tweaks to how we place those children to get better outcomes in accordance with that principle. The member would be aware that we are proposing that there could be a consideration by the court to place a child with a non-Aboriginal carer if it means that those children would stay placed in their community or connected to their broader Aboriginal family. But that has to be on advice from local Aboriginal organisations.

The reason that there is a difference between the actual and the budget target is that there is constantly a tension between making sure that we are clear publicly and to our partners that we want to increase the number of children placed in accordance with the principle, understanding that we have some constraints. Essentially, the constraints will always be that child safety is not compromised, so we will not place a child in accordance with the principle, for instance, with an Aboriginal carer if we do not think it is safe. If there are no safe options to place that child with an Aboriginal carer, then we will opt always to make sure that child is safe. Earlier, the member of Churchlands asked questions about children with complex needs. Of course, they have to have someone who can manage those needs and manage children. It is an absolutely heroic effort that many of those carers, whether they are family or not, take in caring for those children.

I make all of those points. We have had a slight increase, but about two-thirds of Aboriginal children placed in accordance with the child placement principle is how we have been tracking for a while. SNAICC is the national organisation for Aboriginal child protection and Indigenous children. I have just avoided spelling out what SNAICC actually stands for, but it is the national Aboriginal organisation advocating for children in care and child protection. It does an evaluation of how different jurisdictions are going, and it is not backwards in coming forward with areas we can improve on in regard to Aboriginal child care. SNAICC stands for the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. It does an evaluation, and there are also a few other measures that are in place for how we are going under various child protection measures.

Earlier, I mentioned the Aboriginal family-led decision-making trial that we are putting in place and that we have now funded. We are starting to do some work on looking at alternative mechanisms to make sure that once a decision is made for a child to come into care, they are placed in a way that the broader Aboriginal family and community has eyes over, is comfortable with and feels is the best option for that child's safety. That is crucial. Of course we would prefer for those children not to come into care, and that is where our early intervention work comes into play. I have said that we are starting to get some early indicators that those investments are paying off. It is not in my direct portfolio, but we have in place a therapeutic conferencing model in the Children's Court. Between the Attorney General and the Department of Justice, an additional magistrate was funded to look at an alternative mechanism of mediation or conferencing to try to work with the family when child protection matters come before the court. Although it has been in place for only a number of months, we are getting some early indications that the parties there—for instance, the biological family—feel a lot more comfortable with a less adversarial mechanism of discussing the issues that have brought them to the court in the first place.

[12.30 pm]

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Mr R.S. LOVE: I think in part of her answer the minister referred to the Aboriginal family decision-making program, which is mentioned in the budget papers in the places highlighted as significant issues. I note that the minister's answer to the member for Churchlands referred to the two-year pilot that is being led in that program. I am wondering why there is a need for the pilot if there is an acceptance that that is the best way forward? I understand that SNAICC's view is that should be the standard approach. Why is the government not just taking up that as a standard approach in all Aboriginal child placements, rather than as a pilot or in three regional areas?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you, member. First of all, Aboriginal family-led decision-making is a very broad term, so it is important for us to do some work with stakeholders, particularly Aboriginal organisations first and foremost, on how it will be applied in Western Australia. Primarily that is who we will be working with, but also experts working in this area, perhaps researchers and the like, to give all of us some advice on this. For instance, in different states there are different levels of involvement of their equivalents to the Department of Communities and the role of child protection workers from government in the decision-making. I think in Victoria, there is someone at the table from the department involved in the conferencing or the decision-making, whereas in Queensland that is not the case. I hope I did not get that the wrong way around.

Of course, WA is a big state, so there might be a different model of how that is approached in different areas throughout the state, and what maturity of Aboriginal organisations, or who are the right people to around the table to be involved in that. I think that is important for us to do. It is important for us to work with Aboriginal organisations to look at what is going to suit the cohort—for instance, infants at pre-birth planning, and the possibilities there of looking at this sort of model with pre-birth planning, or, alternatively, with reunification, so when a child might come into care for a certain amount of time, but we are working with the family to get that child back, how we would involve that model. It is not to say that there is not an ongoing commitment, but any work that we do in any of the human services areas, I actually think we do need to evaluate how we have gone and the results of our efforts. We have to get a lot better at doing that. What is intended by the trial, is that we make sure that it is a rigorous. Our effort in part is to make sure that there are external eyes on evaluating the success or otherwise of our efforts, not that there is not an ongoing commitment to that model.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Going back to the original situation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle not quite meeting the targets, I guess there are two ways to address that. Perhaps reducing the 56 per cent of the children in care being Aboriginal for a start, but also increasing the capacity within Aboriginal communities to deal with these matters within community. Is the department taking that approach seriously, to produce a wider range of opportunity within the Aboriginal community to provide some of the resources necessary to keep that child within the community?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I can feel the director general next to me champing at the bit to address this issue, because improving our outcomes for Aboriginal people is very much something that the department is very focused on, and as a government we are focused on. The member might remember the amendments to the Children and Community Services Act. One of the primary objectives of that legislation is to have Aboriginal representative organisations and improved involvement of local Aboriginal organisations in the decision-making around child safety, and child placement in this case. Building that kind of infrastructure throughout the state is something that we are very committed to doing. That is what amendments to the legislation and our program of reform are all about. That is with child protection, but also extends to domestic violence, and there is still a lot of work to be done in the homelessness area. We want to make sure that Aboriginal organisations are first and foremost doing that work of working with Aboriginal people to prevent children coming into care, in the case of child protection, or if they are in care, to be involved in the most appropriate placement and to support that placement being safe and stable in the long run.

I have referred in passing to the early intervention and family support work that is being done in the agency and its contracts. The member might recall that we have given a large contract in the metropolitan area to a Wungening consortium to do some early intervention. Wungening is the old Aboriginal alcohol and drug service. It has a consortium of four organisations that are doing in-home support in the metropolitan area. These are families whose children are at risk of coming into care. We gave \$20 million to those organisations, over I think four or five years, to do work with those families, and we are starting to see some very good results. In the case of Wungening, as a result of its work, in a 12-month period, 90 per cent of the families that it is working with did not see children coming into care. Throughout the state, for a lot of that early intervention work, the preference was to give those contracts, to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations or to partner with ACCOs to do that work. I know the financial officer, in his time here, has been very good at making sure that we are aware that with these figures, this is starting to look like it is worth investing in from a financial point of view, obviously quite apart from a human point of view.

Finally on domestic violence, which is one of the big feeders to child protection cases, we absolutely have to look at different ways to approach domestic violence in Aboriginal communities in both the urban and the regional and remote communities, because at the moment, just viewing it as a sort of police-child protection issue, which is sort of the traditional way that we have dealt with it, is really expecting that vulnerable women, usually, are expected

to come through to authorities that they have traditionally viewed with a lot of suspicion and it is not effective. We are trying to change that relationship, and alter it, but that relationship has been built over many decades by some very shameful government policies, like child removal. Looking at different ways of doing things on domestic violence and child protection is very much what we are open to. But I can assure the member that with child protection, child safety will not be compromised, but we need to partner with those organisations.

Again, I have very successfully answered that question in a very longwinded way, but I hope it gives the member an indication of the sorts of innovation that we are interested in exploring. But we need to assess how that goes. It is not just a matter of saying, “We’ll do this because it’s a good intention,” or, “That’s got some good signposts.” We need to actually evaluate whether we are getting better outcomes from that, and that is what we are very much committed to in any of the new work that we are doing. With the Housing First Homelessness Initiative, one of the big attractions is that we have been able to demonstrate some really good outcomes in the short term, as well as long-term outcomes for a very difficult cohort.

I do not know whether the director general would like to talk about department’s cultural capability program as well.

[12.40 pm]

Ms M. Andrews: Just to underpin a lot of what the minister was talking about there, this is clearly at the heart of a lot of our reforms, and what the member was asking us to speak to as well. We are very committed to what is a system change for us. We were talking about the pilot, just to use that as an example. I think we can all look to pilots in history, that of themselves have been successful, but they have not changed the system. We are designing this pilot from the get-go so that it is about changing the system, not just running a successful pilot on its own. To signify what that looks like, from the get-go it has to be doing it with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal leaders, designing the pilot with them—that is the big message they have given us—and from the get-go, not only having an eye to just evaluating it at the end, but also looking at how we redesign those services on the front line to be different. An underpinning principle to the Closing the Gap targets, which we now own as well, is that Aboriginal community-controlled organisations have to be at the centre of all of this also. We have a responsibility to work to develop Aboriginal community-controlled organisations around the state. That is a prerequisite of what we are trying to do here. We know that we cannot achieve the outcomes on our own. In fact, this is about developing ACCOs, handing power over to ACCOs, and doing it in a way that is fit for purpose for that local region and at a pace that is appropriate for that region.

To conclude, we have kicked off the pilot for Aboriginal family-led decision-making. The round tables are happening at the moment with Aboriginal leaders. The chair of our cultural council, Lawford Benning, called me yesterday afternoon to tell me he had attended one of the first round tables. We are extremely positive about working differently with Aboriginal people in genuine partnership to design this pilot that will signal a way of working differently going forward. It is a big job, but just talking about the pilot on its own, it is important to see it in the context of a wider reform program. As the minister indicated, that includes our own cultural competency as an organisation. Confronting the systemic racism, if I can put it that way, that operates within the policies, practices and processes of something that has been set up historically does not serve the majority of those kids who are in care.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a final follow-up question. In terms of the department’s internal resources, does it employ any Aboriginal people at a senior level to help guide any of these types of programs?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to the director general to answer that question.

Ms M. Andrews: In broad terms, our Aboriginal staff numbers are greater than those in the average public sector. Do we consider that adequate? No. The member’s question referred to senior levels. When I was appointed to the role last year, I decided that as a leadership team we were diminished. We had no Aboriginal person at the leadership table, so I invited the most senior Aboriginal officer we had in our organisation to sit at our leadership table from May last year. That officer is a senior executive in our department and the most senior Aboriginal person. She is not there to be the only person thinking about Aboriginal outcomes; it is quite the opposite. She is there to hold us to account. It drives a different conversation; on every topic, every issue and every policy, it forces us to ask how we are shifting to better outcomes for Aboriginal people.

In May this year, I initiated a process of rolling out an organisational redesign that has very much been informed by what we learned about ourselves through Paul Whyte, and then what we learned about ourselves through the COVID-19 pandemic. In that redesign, we established a division of Aboriginal outcomes. This is the first time at the department that we have had a dedicated division. It does not exist yet. Again, to be true to those principles we were talking about, we are about to work through a process with our cultural council, central government and Aboriginal leaders to work out what functions need to sit in that Aboriginal outcomes division that will principally support and hold us to account, like the rest of the organisation and the partners that we work with. The Closing the Gap accountability framework that has been rolled out now will provide a really good context

for the functions and the capabilities that sit in that new division. We should have that new division established by early next year.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Well done.

The CHAIR: The member for Perth has yielded his time. Member for Carine, do you have any questions?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Thank you very much, member for Perth. I refer to page 518, spending changes, and the Tranby Day Centre. Back in October 2019, the Tranby Day Centre received \$500 000. A couple of months later, after it was worked out that the facility was not capable of delivering that services that it was trying to deliver, it got another \$1.7 million to upgrade its facilities. Those renovations started in May 2020 and have, I think, been completed or were to be completed later this year. I note that the services were provided from 7.00 am to 7.00 pm, seven days a week, and that on 20 July 2020 the services were reduced quite considerably from 7.00 am to 2.30 pm during the week, from 7.00 am to 12 noon on Saturday, and from 12 noon to 5.00 pm on Sunday. A range of services were delivered from the Tranby centre from 7.00 am to 7.00 pm, and as a result, other service providers, especially those providing meals, pulled out of their service provision—Street Friends WA is one such organisation that comes to mind. Now that the service provision has been reduced, can the minister tell me who is looking after all those people? I was there on Sunday and a massive number of people were lining up in that area, in this case waiting for it to open at 12 o'clock. I was talking to one of the service providers who said that people were asking them where they could get dinner from. Their response was “We don't know.” Can the minister tell me who is going to help all those homeless people who live around the Tranby Day Centre?

Ms S.F. MCGURK: The member for Perth looks as though he wants to answer the question.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I would be able to answer. The member is not informed.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I am very well informed.

Mr J.N. CAREY: The member is not informed.

The CHAIR: Members, please! I will ask the minister to reply.

[12.50 pm]

Ms S.F. MCGURK: I will answer the question about Tranby. However, before we finish, I have undertaken to talk about the criteria for hardship provisions related to hotel quarantine costs. The criteria are found on the wa.gov.au website. There is a question and answer area—I hope I have got that right—called “Paying for Hotel Quarantine in WA Frequently Asked Questions”. It was updated on 12 October 2020 and goes through who needs to pay, how much it will cost, when it is payable, how to pay, and the payment plans available. It also goes through whether a person can have the quarantine fee waived; and, if so, who is eligible and how this can be done. The criteria for an individual state —

- Eligibility is assessed against criteria including, but not limited to: An individual is unable to meet current financial obligations (e.g. home loan, immediate living expenses)
- Unemployment or on Jobkeeper/Jobseeker or another relevant Centrelink service or an Australian studying overseas
- Loss of a business entity ...

Most of the criteria that we referred to should be there.

With regard to Tranby—again, I certainly make no apology, and I do not think the Member for Perth would either—although we have put in additional investments to deal with crisis and emergency response to homelessness in Perth and the surrounding areas, it is a very difficult area. As I have said many times, each year over \$90 million has been put into this area in Western Australia by governments, both state and federal. The additional funding of \$500 000 for 2020–21 was new money. It was not taken from other services. That is the first thing I want to say. It was an ambitious plan by UnitingCare West to open from 7.00 am to 7.00 pm, seven days a week. I think that it has realised that it has bitten off more than it could chew in that regard. It then proposed to adjust the opening hours so that it could better respond. Those new hours include the provision of meals, a drop-in centre, and case management services or the delivery of actual services.

It is worth saying that the coordination across services to make sure that one service is providing assistance, whether it is meals, beds, a drop-in centre or the like, is not causing a withdrawal of services or demand in other areas that then makes those other areas not sustainable; or, if services are withdrawn in one area, that it causes a peak in demand in another area. That has been one of the challenges. We are very mindful of the coordination across all the different service providers in the homelessness area, which is partly what No Wrong Door is about. That service ensures that whenever people come in, we pick up from where the previous service left off and that there is

Chair; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Shane Love; Mr Donald Punch; Mr John Carey; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Mr Reece Whitby; Ms S. McGurk; Mr D. Punch

some information sharing between services, both not-for-profits, community services and government, and that we are providing the right sort of supports. There is also a role for local government in all of this. In my example of the “20 Lives, 20 Home” program in Fremantle, the City of Fremantle put in money for the tracking of how we were going with that effort to ask: “Did this work? Was this effort worthwhile?” Similarly, that is what we are hoping to put in place in all our efforts.

It is difficult; there is demand. I am pretty sure there was demand when the member was in government too. I do not remember homelessness being solved or there being no street-present people when the member was in government. It is an issue across the western world. In any capital city or regional centre there are street-present people. I have been very heartened to see local governments address this issue, whether it be the City of Bunbury or the City of Swan, or the City of Fremantle in my jurisdiction, and I think it will be the case with the City of Perth, too, under new leadership. Local governments are saying, “We understand that we have to be part of this conversation. What is going to be an effective solution?” We want effective long-term outcomes for those clients, but that is not an easy get. We also have to make sure that our emergency or crisis response is worthwhile. The member for Perth advocated for extra resources and, as a result, he got significant new resources put into the CBD and broader area. We continue to make sure that that is providing the best outcome where we can, but I do not pretend that that is easy. I do not pretend that working with some of those clients is easy. As I have said before, if anyone has the solution, I am all ears. Sometimes what seems like a quick solution is actually very short-term, and that is what is challenging.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The Perth tent city has been set up within 50 metres of the Tranby Day Centre. I do not know if the minister has been to the Perth tent city yet, but I was there on Sunday. One of the consequences of the Tranby centre not being open for extra hours is that the tent city does not have toilet facilities. About 50 people live there; one group is south of the bike path and another group is north of the bike path. There was a toilet onsite but it was removed—I am not sure whether by the council or the department. There is also nowhere for them to put their rubbish. They are in desperate need of a rubbish bin or some sort of a facility to collect rubbish, and they are also in desperate need of toilet facilities. Because the Tranby Day Centre is shut, they now do not have access to those facilities. There is a pregnant woman there, as well as people who are extremely sick. I just wonder how they are going to cope in that tent city that they have set up next to the Tranby centre when the facilities and services have been taken away. I am not sure who did that, but I thought that was very inhumane.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Member, as I have demonstrated a number of times, we have put additional money into dealing with homelessness and looking at evidence-based long-term solutions. I understand that there is an emergency and a dire need to get people off the street now, but I actually am concerned about any sort of encouragement of people going to Lord Street, or any other congregation of people. I think that should be discouraged. It is not safe for either the people who are there, or the public. In fact, I have asked the department to work with other government departments and agencies to make sure that people are aware of the sorts of facilities that the member for Perth spoke about early on in these proceedings; that is, the emergency accommodation facilities provided by UnitingCare West using the over \$1 million that was given to it by Lotterywest. Beds are available. I would ask providers or anyone who goes there to encourage people not to stay in those public places, which, as I said, are not safe for a very vulnerable cohort. They need to avail themselves of the emergency accommodation that we have provided and the beds, services and supports that we have made available. The Public Transport Authority, Main Roads Western Australia, the City of Perth, the Mental Health Commission, WA Police and community services, together with the Department of Communities, are all working with those individuals who are camping at Lord Street to understand their needs, move them to safe and stable accommodation, and get them the proper supports. That will include women like that woman who is pregnant. She will have been offered supports. We will continue to work with her or anyone else who is there to give them a bed and the supports that they need. That is our obligation and that is what we are working very hard to do. As I said, Lotterywest has made beds available now

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: They were asking for beds when I was there.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Beds are available now through UnitingCare West.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I will tell them that.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Lotteries has made additional funds available, and we have crisis beds. We are continually working with the service providers to make sure that those services will suit those clients’ needs.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, members.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm