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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Thursday, 25 May 2023

Legislative Assembly

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ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am.

Division 21: WA Health, \$6 962 660 000 —

Ms C.M. Collins, Chair.

Ms A. Sanderson, Minister for Health.

Ms A. Kelly, Acting Director General.

Mr R. Anderson, Acting Director General.

Ms J. South, Acting Assistant Director General.

Dr A. Robertson, Chief Health Officer; Assistant Director General.

Ms G. Clifford, Acting Assistant Director General.

Mr P. Forden, Chief Executive, South Metropolitan Health Service.

Dr S. Bowen, Chief Executive, North Metropolitan Health Service.

Mr R. Toms, Chief Executive, Health Support Services.

Mr R. Pulsford, Acting Chief Executive, WA Country Health Service.

Mr S. Tomson, Acting Chief Executive, PathWest.

Ms V. Jovanovic, Chief Executive, Child and Adolescent Health Service.

Dr L. Bennet, Acting Chief Executive, East Metropolitan Health Service.

Mr C. Barnes, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: My question relates to page 88 of budget paper No 3 and the health and mental health section. I refer to the \$81.1 million to purchase the private facility and beds at St John of God Midland Public Hospital. Is this a one-off payment to transfer these beds into the public sector perpetually or for only a finite period of time?

Ms A. SANDERSON: As the member rightly points out, this budget has allocated \$81 million for the purchase of 60 beds. The beds already exist; they are already built. That has some benefit in that it limits the delay in the ability to construct such a large number of beds on the facility. I think it is fair to say that Midland Public Hospital was not built to the scale that it should have been at the time and was not futureproofed. There was a lot of commentary at the time that it lacked the number of beds required to service the community. It services the important east metropolitan catchment, but it also services the wheatbelt—the Northam area. It is, essentially, under strain and needs more beds. This is a way of rapidly increasing the bed stock in the east metro area, at Midland, with limited delay in terms of construction, given our constrained construction market at the moment. I will hand to Mr Rob Anderson, who can outline the financial details.

Mr R. Anderson: I think the question was in relation to whether this is a recurrent or one-off cost.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes; is it a recurrent payment? Are these beds just for this year or is it a recurrent payment?

Mr R. Anderson: The beds are recurrent. Once we purchase them, they become part of the number of public beds in that facility. It is a one-off cost to purchase those beds then we have them infinitely.

Ms L. METTAM: Will there be recurrent costs going forward?

Mr R. Anderson: Yes, there will be as per any other public bed.

Ms L. METTAM: Are these 60 beds, which already exist in the system, included in the 1 147 new beds added since the 2021–22 budget?

Ms A. SANDERSON: They are included in the planned expansion of 600.

Ms L. METTAM: It is on the same page, or it could be a new question. My question relates to a dot point further down, which also refers to the 1 147 new beds added to the system since 2021–22. Can the minister provide a breakdown by hospital and number of new beds? What is the location of the 547 plus the 600 beds that are referred to?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The 547 beds built in the last year and a half consist of 157 new beds at Joondalup Health Campus, with 102 general and 55 mental health; 111 new beds at Peel Health Campus, with 81 general and 30 mental health; 70 new beds at St John of God Midland Public Hospital, with 60 general and 10 mental health; 58 new beds will be at Bunbury—sorry, I am reading the future 600. Was the question about the 547 beds?

Ms L. METTAM: It was about the 547 and the 600 beds.

Ms A. SANDERSON: My apologies. The 547 beds are spread around the system. I am happy to list the main areas and the main hospitals with those beds, but there is a lot of detailed information so the member may want to put that on notice in terms of exactly where the 547 beds are. Overall there are 30 more beds at Bentley Health Service and Osborne Park Hospital received another 30. There was an increase at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Fremantle Hospital. Rockingham General Hospital and Bunbury Hospital at South West Health Campus received another 30 modular beds. There was an increase in ICU-capacity beds at Fiona Stanley Hospital. It is very detailed and broken down; therefore, the member will need to put that one on notice.

[9.10 am]

The CHAIR: Member, would you like to put that on notice?

Ms L. METTAM: Just to confirm, we cannot have that as supplementary information?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes, I would like to put that question on notice. That is the breakdown of the 547. How about the breakdown of the 600 beds?

Ms A. SANDERSON: As I stated previously, the breakdown of the 600 new beds is 147 at Joondalup Health Campus, comprising 102 general and 55 mental health beds; 111 at Peel Health Campus, comprising 81 general and 30 mental health; 70 at St John of God Midland Public Hospital, comprising 60 general and 10 mental health; 58 at Bunbury Hospital at South West Health Campus; 53 mental health beds at Graylands Hospital; 40 mental health beds at Fremantle Hospital; 40 at Geraldton Health Campus; 36 at Bentley Health Service, which includes the surgicentre and mental health beds; 18 at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital; 10 at Rockingham General Hospital; nine at Armadale Health Service; and three at Laverton Hospital.

Ms L. METTAM: Are all the 547 beds currently open?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 88 of budget paper No 3 and the new women's and babies' hospital. When will the minister publicly release the business case?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I do not have a date for that. We are committed to releasing it, but I cannot give the member a date.

Ms L. METTAM: Is it likely to be in the next month or next two months?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is likely to be within weeks rather than months.

Ms L. METTAM: The plan at the new site includes a multistorey car park. Is that included in the \$1.8 billion budget?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Car parking has been provisioned within the \$1.8 billion budget.

Ms L. METTAM: The original plan for the hospital at the Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre site included upgrades, a state-of-the-art theatre, an ICU and an emergency department. Will these upgrades still go ahead in full?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes, they will, and they were funded in the last budget. They will go ahead regardless of the decision to relocate the women's and babies' hospital. The funding, which already exists, includes an upgrade of ward C14 valued at \$22.25 million; a GMP (RAPID) laboratory and cyclotron, with a project value of \$32.4 million; an emergency department upgrade and a toxicology urgent care clinic, which is already in last year's budget, at \$30.66 million; the replacement of the biplanar unit for the Neurological Intervention and Imaging Service of Western Australia to the value of \$11.4 million; a new image-guided hybrid theatre for \$12.1 million; and a new 10-bed intensive care unit to the value of \$16.78 million. These are already appropriated, and in the budget.

Ms L. METTAM: I understood that the upgrade, or new emergency department and hybrid theatre, would be at a cost of about \$500 million. Are we looking at something quite different now?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I have never seen that costing. I am not sure what the member is referring to, but this is the cost that was developed by the department and North Metropolitan Health Service and funded in last year's budget.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister confirm that the upgrades at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital will in no way be short-changed as a result of shifting the women's and babies' hospital?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We are committed to the upgrades, and they are already in the budget. I can confirm that Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital will receive significant upgrades.

Ms L. METTAM: My understanding from people who were involved in the working group is that these upgrades fall short of what was originally proposed. Can the minister confirm that that is not the case?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The member is essentially using speculation from a third party, and I cannot confirm that speculation. What I can confirm is what is in the budget paper and what the government has confirmed, which is that we are committed to these upgrades and the money is in the budget.

Ms L. METTAM: The new plan includes upgrades to Osborne Park Hospital. Are these upgrades funded out of the \$1.8 billion allocated to the new women's and babies' hospital?

Ms A. SANDERSON: One of the great benefits of the decision we made to relocate the women's and babies' hospital is that we are able to fund significant upgrades to Osborne Park Hospital. South of the river, we will have a range of birthing and maternity choices for women that do not exist now. The choices will range from a family birthing centre with support for community-based birthing and hospital inpatient birthing, all the way through to facilities for high-risk neonates and safe high-intervention birthing.

Osborne Park Hospital was long neglected under the former government. This government has committed to its future and ensured it will remain fit for purpose as a strong community hospital in the northern suburbs. It is intended that the Osborne Park Hospital upgrades will be able to be delivered within the envelope of the \$1.8 billion, but the government is committed to the upgrade. Whether more or less appropriation is required will be determined by the business case, but we are absolutely committed to the future of Osborne Park Hospital. The significant upgrades that have already occurred under this government are testament to that commitment.

Ms L. METTAM: With respect to the upgrades that happened previously, is this unit now being fully utilised?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I am sorry?

Ms L. METTAM: Is the unit being fully utilised?

Ms A. SANDERSON: What unit?

Ms L. METTAM: The unit at Osborne Park Hospital.

Ms A. SANDERSON: What unit? There are numerous units.

The CHAIR: Member, can you refer to the line item?

Ms A. SANDERSON: There needs to be a line item.

Ms L. METTAM: During last year's estimates, the minister touched on the fact that it was potentially not the vibe to have a family birthing centre at the Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre site and suggested that perhaps Osborne Park Hospital was a better site for a family birthing centre, as part of the women's and babies' hospital. Does the minister anticipate the family birthing centre will be going there?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Correct. I think I have publicly said that numerous times. I have also requested that consideration be given to a standalone family birthing centre at the Murdoch site. At the moment, the family birthing centre in the south is in the hospital, which is not ideal. The best practice is that they are standalone centres with close links to specialist services if required. I have asked that consideration be given to a standalone family birthing centre at the Murdoch site as well as at Osborne Park Hospital.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the minister accept the criticism from clinicians that the move to the Fiona Stanley Hospital site will result in preventable deaths?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I respect the concerns of clinicians, and I will make a few comments about that. I understand that clinicians who work around the inner western suburbs—the Subiaco site or the Nedlands site—have been given every indication that they will continue to work around that site. For a multitude of reasons, their lives, and their practice and work, are centred around that. People need to be very careful about the language they use and to use evidence to back up claims like that. I also think that those concerns are not universally held amongst this specialty and they run an outstanding and excellent service for very vulnerable patients. They are used to running that in a particular way, as a particular model. I encourage them and will work with North Metropolitan Health Service to expand their thinking about what a new model of care looks like for those vulnerable patients. That is certainly the conversation I have had with them.

Around 40 to 45 babies a year may need surgery within the first hour of life. Those births are almost always planned, and when they are not, they would travel anyway. Those babies are usually diagnosed in utero and it is a planned elective caesarean and arrangements are made. That makes the planning a little easier around this cohort. There is already a specialist neonatal service at Fiona Stanley Hospital and I encourage the member to visit that service as well. I know she visited the Child and Adolescent Health Service neonatal service and talked to the clinicians there. We will provide world-class facilities and clinical excellence for those babies and women.

We also have the incredible newborn emergency transport service, which I have seen in person, and the work they do is quite extraordinary. The babies are not “bounced around in an ambulance”. I have heard that phrase used; that is not reasonable language. This is an incredible service with a paediatrician and paediatric nurse. The very delicate and vulnerable little patients are cared for very well. The service has received a significant investment under this government over the past few years. Overall, when we make a decision for such an important and strategic piece of infrastructure, it is important that we take into consideration all the risks and all the benefits to the broader community. Individual cohorts need absolutely important consideration, but in my view the fundamental risk that the business case highlighted is that given the complexity of the site at QEII, construction would not start on the hospital until 2028. That is a huge risk. Construction disruption and a constricted site at an already important tertiary hospital would be a significant risk to the community. As minister for the whole system, and as a government that needs to consider the whole system, and obviously the department as well, we came to the view that we could manage the risk and provide an outstanding service for everyone who needs this service—women, babies and women who need gynaecology and oncology rather than maternity services—and that this would be a far better outcome overall for everyone.

[9.20 am]

Ms L. METTAM: I thank the minister; I took up the opportunity to have a tour of King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women and the neonatal unit. As part of that tour, I heard very real concerns from a consultant. He raised concerns from a clinician’s point of view. In fact, he stated that he believed they would be better off at King Edward Memorial Hospital until the new site, the gold standard, was available next to Perth Children’s Hospital. Very real concerns were also raised about time spent in the neonate transfer service because, as good as that service is, those vulnerable babies, from a clinical perspective, are far better off being in a stable environment. Real concerns were expressed about the shift from the gold standard of being close to Perth Children’s Hospital, which is what it is about. How many clinician movements are there every year between Perth Children’s Hospital and King Edward Memorial Hospital? I imagine this would be a consideration as part of the decision to go to the Fiona Stanley Hospital site.

Ms A. SANDERSON: The member would have to put that question on notice.

The CHAIR: Member, you will need to lodge that as a question on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister provide that by supplementary information?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No, we are not providing supplementary information.

I will respond to some of the commentary. The point I am trying to make, and have made to clinicians, is that we may not need to transfer them. We are open-minded about what the model of care is and what other facilities may need to be provided at Perth Children’s Hospital and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital to maintain that link for that very small and predictable cohort. I will hand over to Dr Shirley Bowen, who will outline what the consultation process will be going forward with the clinicians and what it is they are looking at. I caution people involved around the language and I would certainly caution—I think this has happened to some extent—against trying to whip up anxieties amongst prospective parents who may be having vulnerable babies. That would be irresponsible. I disagree with the proposition that has been put by one person that they would be better off staying at King Edward as opposed to a brand new, world-class tertiary women’s and newborn babies’ hospital, which will have a specialised neonatal unit. I fundamentally do not agree with that statement. As I said before, there are varying views amongst clinicians about this move. The thing that has concerned people is that the government did not speak to them before it made the decision around the relocation. Ultimately, we needed to make a decision to keep the project moving and we were not prepared to entertain any other delays, given the importance of getting that project up on the ground. I will ask Dr Bowen to outline some of the processes going forward with neonate specialists around this cohort.

Dr S. Bowen: Over the next six to eight weeks we will convene extensive consultation with the clinician groups. We have already been meeting with them regularly since the announcement—that is, the clinical staff associations of the major hospitals involved. We announced this week that we will meet with the individual heads of department of the relevant areas of each of the hospitals. This includes Fiona Stanley Hospital, King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women and Perth Children’s Hospital, and under that the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital group as well. We will discuss with them as individuals their concerns or strategies and options for the future and then convene multiple workshops to look at various subgroups that fall out of that, which includes neonatal transfers, gynae-oncology for adult women, birthing services, a family birth centre and a range of issues that now need to be finalised to enable the transfer.

[9.30 am]

Ms A. SANDERSON: If this is it on this issue, I will close by saying that in a perfect world we would maintain that link between birthing and the children's hospital—of course we would. But we are not able to build on that site. That is the fundamental issue. Women need access to an ICU. At the moment, women are transferred from King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. There is significant risk in that. The move to the Fiona Stanley Hospital site will provide a link for very unwell women to access ICU and reduce the risk that exists now. I am confident that we will come up with a model of care over the next seven years to ensure that we are also able to maintain that strong link for neonates.

Ms L. METTAM: There was concern about newborns accessing paediatric specialists at Perth Children's Hospital. Will there be any benefits for the medi-hotel at Fiona Stanley Hospital as a result of this move? Does the minister anticipate that there will be a take-up of those beds?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is actually a very large development. It is a health precinct development. One part of it is a medi-hotel. There will also be short-stay accommodation, a hotel, other medical services, consulting rooms, imaging, primary care and allied health. It is a whole precinct of health care. It will be beneficial to every user of that campus, whether they are at Fiona Stanley Hospital, Sir John of God Hospital or the women's and babies' hospital. There is potential to support it. The decision was made around access to the site and the inability to build at Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre. The medi-hotel was not a major deciding factor. It will be an incredible use of that land and an incredible development and will be helpful for everyone who will use that campus.

Ms L. METTAM: When were the operators of the medi-hotel advised?

Ms A. SANDERSON: They were advised at the same time as everyone else.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I wish to go back to the minister's previous comment. Does she think it is appropriate, as health minister, to caution clinicians who are working in the system about coming out and talking? Obviously, some of them have not been consulted. Is it appropriate for the minister to caution them when they are just expressing their opinions and concerns about the challenges and dangers?

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: It does not sound like an estimates question.

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is not a budget matter.

The CHAIR: Member, can you please refer to a line item?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is the same line item relating to Fiona Stanley Hospital.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Is it a question about expenditure?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There is an amount of \$544 million.

The CHAIR: Is your question about the expenditure?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is just a continuation of my question.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I think the question is completely out of order but I will answer it. I did not caution clinicians. I did not say the word "clinician".

Ms L. METTAM: What transport initiatives are being put in place or costed to ensure the safe and timely transfer of babies to Perth Children's Hospital?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We have seen significant investment in the newborn emergency transport service. Dr Shirley Bowen outlined the process going forward with clinicians who will develop that. We have a number of years to develop that and we will do it diligently. As I said, it may not be necessary to transport some babies. Maybe clinicians will be able to go there from PCH. There is a range of opportunities on the table. I am encouraging people to think outside of the model of care that they deliver now and to think broadly about how care might be delivered in the future.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a final further question on the Fiona Stanley Hospital car parking situation. The minister said there will be a multistorey car park. Is she taking into account the fact that at the moment people cannot get a car park at Fiona Stanley Hospital and they end up running late for appointments and the like? Will there be any activity in the next few years, before that multistorey car park is built, to alleviate the car parking issues at Fiona Stanley Hospital?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The plans involve two multistorey car parks. We will not only replace the car parking that we were going to build on, but also provide two more multistorey car parks. That work can commence as soon as practically possible. We expect it to start sooner than the build for the hospital. I will hand over to Paul Forden to give more detail. In terms of access, out of the two campuses, Fiona Stanley Hospital is literally just off the freeway off-ramp and there is a train station as well as multiple car parks. Parking is always an issue in health precincts. I am sympathetic because it is hard wherever we go. At every hospital and every single precinct, parking is the issue. This is the most accessible campus in the metropolitan area. We will be providing two multistorey car parks as part of this development. I will hand over to Paul Forden to give a bit more detail.

Mr P. Forden: Obviously, part of it will be to expand the car parking. In the interim, we are reducing demand for car parking. All we have done is introduce schemes whereby staff can work from home for periods of time as appropriate. That has reduced demand for car parking. We have also had a considerable increase in digital outpatients, which has reduced a lot of demand from patients having to travel to the hospital and park their car. Obviously, we have expanded our use of the bicycle scheme.

Ms L. METTAM: Apparently, the reason for the shift to Fiona Stanley was the parking issues at the QEII site. The minister is talking about a significant investment in two multistorey parking sites at Fiona Stanley in the face of significant concerns raised by clinicians and a shift from a gold-standard approach to delivering and supporting neonatal care. Can the minister understand why there is real concern about how this decision was made?

Ms A. SANDERSON: At no single point have I ever said that car parking was the reason we made that decision. There are a multitude of reasons. Of course we would not make a decision like this based on car parking. The member's comment—it is not a question—is fundamentally wrong.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I want to get this clear in my mind. Will any extra car parks be built in that interim seven-year period or are there other arrangements, such as those we just heard about?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Two multistorey car parks will be built within that period.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the exact date for completion of those multistorey car parks? When will they be available?

Ms A. SANDERSON: That will be determined by the tender.

Ms L. METTAM: One of the issues for the QEII site relates to transport and congestion issues. The minister or perhaps the Premier said that staff would not have anywhere to park and shuttle buses would be used for 10 years. I guess the point I am making is that the government, in supporting this dramatic shift in its approach to the women's and babies' hospital, is going to significant lengths to address the parking issues at Fiona Stanley Hospital. We would like some confidence that every effort has been explored to address the well-understood challenges at the Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre site, given the concerns raised by clinicians and the step away from the gold standard in delivering care.

[9.40 am]

Ms A. SANDERSON: I can give the community absolute assurance that every consideration was given to every single aspect of this construction and development—absolutely. This decision was not made lightly. The constraint around the Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre car park is about not only the land but also the contract. In the development of Perth Children's Hospital, the former government agreed to a contract with a private provider that limited the ability of any other operator to build and run a car park facility at that site—not only the state but also any other operator on QEII, such as the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research. It is an incredibly constrictive commercial arrangement, so that was one of the considerations around it, but not the whole consideration.

Another part was, absolutely, staff disruption and safety. During the Perth Children's Hospital build, staff parking was relocated to Graylands Hospital and staff were shuttle-bused to the QEII site. They were very cooperative and I appreciated their support in that, but—hand on heart—I did not feel it was appropriate to inflict that on Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Perth Children's Hospital staff over a protracted period. There were also risks around ambulances getting through construction works to access the emergency departments at Perth Children's Hospital and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. Every day, 14 000 people access that site, including staff, patients and support workers. It is not at all a small consideration.

Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital runs statewide speciality services that need to be maintained without disruption. Maintaining bed availability, outpatient facilities and all the other services without disruption was going to be impossible. As I said, the business case outlined that we could not even start construction for the women's and babies' hospital until 2028 because of all the considerations. I acknowledge and appreciate the concerns of the clinicians around neonates. We are very committed to providing the best possible model of care for those babies and their families. This is a really good decision for women and particularly those who live in the suburbs who want access to a range of maternity choices. They will have access to family birthing centre options, the hospital as well as acute neonatal care and acute care. This is a good decision for women and really puts women at the centre of a women's and newborns' hospital.

Ms L. METTAM: We have heard already many neonate clinicians speak out against this decision. The minister said there are clinicians who support it. Are any of those clinicians willing to speak out publicly?

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is not for me to say.

Ms L. METTAM: It would certainly help.

The CHAIR: The minister is not able to answer on other people's behalf.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 301 of budget paper No 2 and the \$6.3 million for the delivery of specialist cancer services across regional Western Australia. I would like to ask about the cancer services in the metropolitan area, specifically the Comprehensive Cancer Centre at QEII. I am just wondering whether the minister can provide an update on that.

Ms A. SANDERSON: That does not relate to this budget line item.

The CHAIR: Member, are you looking at page 301?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The member referred to regional cancer services. Metropolitan cancer services do not relate to that budget line item.

The CHAIR: It is not related to this budget line item.

Ms L. METTAM: I will go to page 88 of budget paper No 3, regarding electronic medical records. There is \$99.4 million to complete the first stage of the EMR program. I am specifically interested in Perth Children's Hospital. When will this be implemented?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The first part of the electronic medical record program at Perth Children's Hospital will be at the Perth Children's Hospital ICU. That will be part of stage 1. We do not have a date at this point but we will have one in coming weeks.

Ms L. METTAM: When will the EMR be implemented at PCH?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Stage 1 of the EMR implementation includes Perth Children's Hospital ICU. We do not have a date at this point but we will have one in coming weeks.

Ms L. METTAM: When will all stages of the EMR be implemented at PCH?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The time frame for PCH will be subject to the stage 2 business case. We are at stage 1 and we are still completing that.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the minister anticipate that stage 1 will be implemented this year?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will hand to Rob Toms from Health Support Services. He can give the member more of a time line.

Mr R. Toms: Stage 1 of the program for Perth Children's Hospital includes two key items. One is the deployment of the digital medical record around the end of July this year. The second item is the implementation of the ICU EMR. Planning work is still underway for when that will be completed, but it will be completed as part of stage 1.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the 24/7 supernumerary resuscitation team at PCH in place now?

[9.50 am]

Ms A. SANDERSON: The supernumerary resus team was part of the Australian Nursing Federation's 10-point plan, which was accepted by the government when it put it forward. It was very sensible and constructive, so it was accepted. I make the point that there have always been four resuscitation paediatric nurses on the roster for the emergency department. Obviously, recruitment for this has been ongoing and over a period. We are in a challenging recruitment environment. Paediatric nursing is very specialised. Paediatric nurses cannot be pulled from the general agency pool and paediatric resuscitation is a higher competency and can take about 18 months to achieve because they need real-life resuscitations to achieve competencies. It is not as though highly trained resuscitation paediatric nurses can be churned out. They need to have hands-on experience with paediatric resuscitations. The emergency department at Perth Children's Hospital has around one or two a day, I understand. It is not a high level, which is a good thing that it is not occurring too regularly. It takes time for nurses to gain that competency. A number of nursing staff are currently in the training pipeline to achieve that competency. As much as humanly possible, Child and Adolescent Health Service is seeking to fast-track that training. Currently, we are achieving around two to four supernumerary resuscitation teams and it improves every day. That is on top of the existing roster. We are making good progress with that implementation. We have also received the ratio audit for Perth Children's Hospital emergency department, which outlines that it is exceptionally well staffed given the recent uplift of resourcing that the government provided for staffing to a point of 1:2 to 1:3 nurses per patients per day. On top of that is the supernumerary team.

Ms L. METTAM: When does the minister anticipate the supernumerary resuscitation team will be in place?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is progressing well and we expect it to be complete in the coming months.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 300 of budget paper No 2, volume 1 and paragraph 31 under the heading "Building World-Class Infrastructure". Does this include and can the minister provide an update on the comprehensive Cancer Centre at Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No, it does not.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to provide any update on that project?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We have provided funding for a business case and that has been agreed with the commonwealth and the proponents. My understanding is that they are very happy with the time frame. I met with the proponents recently and asked whether they would be able to, or had ambition to, bring forward the project and they said no because there is a lot of work to do around the business case. We are working with the proponents and the commonwealth around what that business case will look like.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the minister share the Premier's concern that the cost may be much more significant than was originally proposed?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I think it is obvious that construction costs have gone up by about 60 per cent for health infrastructure. Most of our projects are coming in at about 60 per cent higher than originally costed. Whether it is building a house, a school, a hospital, a road or a train line, costs are higher.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 116 of budget paper No 3 and workforce attraction and retention. A dot point refers to \$1 million in 2023–24 being spent on advertising and recruitment campaigns. What is the breakdown for the international and national spend?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I can talk around what that funding is for and some of the other workforce initiatives, but for the breakdown of the spend the member will need to put that question on notice. The \$1 million is an extension of the Belong campaign, which was launched a couple of years ago to attract interstate and international healthcare workers. It is largely all interstate and international. It is to attract healthcare workers into our system. As the member knows, there is a global rush, particularly for nursing staff. It also includes medical and allied health staff. The campaign has been very successful and our current recruitment efforts over the last couple of years have been very successful. WA Health's workforce has increased by 29 per cent in FTE since 2017. We obviously need to continue that momentum, which is why we have continued with new initiatives in this budget, including the extension of the Belong campaign. There are also attraction and retention bonuses for graduate nurses and midwives who will receive \$12 000 over three years to pay their Higher Education Contribution Scheme debt if they take a position in regional health, which I am sure regional members opposite appreciate. We know that when people have a good and early experience of regional healthcare, they tend to stay there. We have also expanded our hospital places significantly for graduate nurses in the metropolitan area as well as in the regions.

Ms L. METTAM: To date, how many nurses have been employed as a result of this campaign?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The member would have to put that question on notice. I do not have that in front of me.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the answer be provided by supplementary information?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No, we are not providing supplementary information. I will ask Jodie South, who might be able to provide a bit more detail and context.

Ms J. South: Directly as part of the Belong campaign, we have a dedicated recruitment pool for nursing and midwifery. To date, it has facilitated 493 appointments.

Ms L. METTAM: To clarify, it is 493 since what date?

Ms J. South: Belong started in October 2021.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 115 of budget paper No 3 and the COVID response. On the \$12.3 million in warehousing costs for rapid antigen tests, how many of the 10 warehouses hired to stockpile RATs are still being leased?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I think everyone who experienced the last few years understands that rapid antigen tests were a really essential part of our COVID response, particularly since Omicron. If we recall December 2022, just as I became Minister for Health, we were watching Omicron rip through the eastern states and around the world. We essentially saw a complete breakdown of community services, policing, schools, workforces and so on. No-one could get hold of RATs. The government procured numerous RATs from a range of suppliers. At that time, rapid antigen tests were essentially commandeered by the commonwealth as soon as they arrived at the airport, and no-one could get supply. It has been a really good and important part of our response to COVID. To date, none of those RATs have expired, to my knowledge, and they are still widely used by the community. I think the acting Mental Health Commissioner used one this morning to find out that he would not be at estimates because he is COVID positive. They continue to be a really important part of our strategy in managing COVID in the community. I will refer to Rob Toms, who might be able to outline storage.

[10.00 am]

Mr R. Toms: Since the state has possessed the 110 million RATs, we have used about two-thirds already, so two-thirds have been distributed already. We have two warehouses we own ourselves and eight we use from external service providers. All the warehouses are still being used to store rapid antigen tests, personal protective equipment and other goods we have procured over the past few years, but we are working through a process of consolidating down to five over time as the stocks deplete and we utilise a lot of the products we have. We are working through a plan at the moment for what that ramp-down looks like and the time frames.

Ms L. METTAM: When is completion of the lease anticipated, and what is the ongoing cost of it?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We will take that on notice. The member will need to put that on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: I am confirming that the minister stated that no RATs have expired already. How many are due to expire before the end of the year?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I said “to my knowledge”. The member would have to put that question on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 114 of budget paper No 3 and non-hospital services expenditure. The first dot point states that \$239.5 million has been spent to meet contractual obligations and additional contract management costs. Can the minister provide some detail on what contracts this has affected and how much was required to meet obligations and additional costs?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Those contracts are outlined on the same page. There is a range of contracts, including with St John WA ambulance.

Ms L. METTAM: The second dot point highlights the increased costs for indexation to meet RiskCover premiums. Can the member advise how much the additional costs are and why the premiums have increased?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Could the member repeat the question?

Ms L. METTAM: The second dot point touches on the increased cost of indexation to meet RiskCover premiums. Can the minister advise how much the additional costs are and why the premiums have increased?

Ms G. Clifford: I do not have the specific cost of the RiskCover premiums to hand. They would be part of the broader cost indexation that we apply to all our core services. I do not have the specific RiskCover cost with me.

Ms L. METTAM: Do you not have that information?

Ms G. Clifford: Not specific to RiskCover because RiskCover is one part of the cost increases that we see as part of our non-hospital services. Those will cover cost indexation generally, which relates to cost-of-living and wage increases, so it is broader than just RiskCover.

Ms A. SANDERSON: It would also include the cost-of-living payment, the wage increase and any other cost increase of conditions or entitlements that would have been agreed to in the enterprise bargaining agreement as well as those RiskCover costs.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 116 of budget paper No 3 and the Peel Health Campus transformation transition costs. It states —

To support the transition of privately run health services at the Peel Health Campus back into public hands, an additional \$6.5 million will be spent in 2023–24 reflecting the one year extension to the transition date.

During the transition phase who is responsible for the upkeep or maintenance of the health facility?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The contractor.

Ms L. METTAM: Why has the transition been pushed out by one year?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The transition was extended. I outlined quite extensively when we made the announcement last year that it would be extended essentially because we found a range of IT issues, primarily upgrades. We sought a smooth transition of records, policies, procedures, processes and, particularly, IT infrastructure, which needed some work to be brought up to public health standards in order for us to take ownership of the asset, and more time was required to do that. I might ask Rob Toms from health support services, who is leading that stream of work, to give more detail.

Mr R. Toms: When we undertook our initial assessments of what the IT landscape looked like at Peel, it was very, very different from how the public health system works. There are a lot more systems and IT solutions used in the public health system than were used at Peel, so that meant a lot more work was required to move the campus over to the public health system and implement a lot of new IT systems. We also needed to replace its network and a lot of infrastructure on the site. The complexity and amount of work required to do the IT transition was much greater than originally anticipated.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I add that it has long been the desire of the community that Peel Health Campus be a fully government run hospital. It has long been the desire of the community and the staff who work there. More than 90 per cent of the staff have opted to transition into the public health system, which is a huge endorsement of this policy and this decision by this government. It is a huge endorsement, and we are very committed to this transition and we want to ensure that it occurs as smoothly as possible with the least disruption to patients and staff. That is why we sought to extend the date and make sure we can do that. It is like commissioning a brand new hospital when services are brought online, and we have to make sure that everything is working from day one.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Referring to the question the minister has just been asked about who is responsible for the cost of transitioning, I wonder whether the minister could inform the chamber who was responsible for privatising the Peel Health Campus in the first place.

[10.10 am]

Ms A. SANDERSON: I thank the member for the question. Of course, the member is pointing to the fact that it was a former Liberal government that privatised that health campus in the first place to a company that was based

in Singapore and not in any way interested in delivering good healthcare outcomes to the community. It has long been a sore point for the community down there, and I think the numbers of staff who have agreed to transition is a testament to how strongly supported this policy is.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister concerned that 10 per cent of staff have not committed to stay and continue working at Peel Health Campus, and how much of the working cohort does 10 per cent represent?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will hand to Paul Forden to answer that question.

Mr P. Forden: Just to clarify: it is not that 10 per cent of the staff have said “no”; they are just seeking supplementary information et cetera. We have had around two per cent of staff say “no”, and they are mostly people who are at the end of their working career who have said they plan to retire.

Ms L. METTAM: Obviously, there is significant concern in the community about what is happening with the planned upgrade of the existing facility, which was announced in 2020. What is happening with the upgrade, and what assurance can the minister provide that this will happen as soon as possible? What is the time frame for the upgrade?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The government is very committed to the upgrade and is going through the business case process. That is a very important process to make sure that we get the upgrade right. We committed to upgrading the services we previously announced, which include a number of new services and expansions and the expansion of bed stock. It is still very much part of the government’s capital infrastructure plan. We have to go through the business case and the project definition plan to get a time frame. Once that is complete—I expect that to be complete certainly this year—we will have a time frame, and we will then be able to provide that time frame to the community. I think it is important to acknowledge the very constrained construction market that we are operating in, and we have to smooth the pipeline of work. There are a lot of particularly health infrastructure upgrades occurring—record infrastructure upgrades—and there is not a large number of commercial builders that can build to the standard that Western Australia requires, so we have to make sure that the market is able to deliver, as well. We will be working with various proponents when we get to that stage to make sure that we can deliver as soon as we possibly can.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the minister anticipate works to begin next year, as part of the time frame for the transition?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes, I do. It is separate from the transition. I make that point: this is separate from the transition.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes. What efforts are being made or will be made in this transition to ensure that staff are retained at Peel Health Campus?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Every effort is being made, chair. I think, from the fact that 90 per cent have said “yes”, two per cent have said “no” because they are retiring, and we are working with the remaining eight per cent, the member can see that every effort has been made, and it has been an outstanding success.

Ms L. METTAM: One could argue that the concerns at Peel Health Campus have raised a lot of public concern and concern amongst staff, as well. Is the minister able to provide a time frame for when the operations of Peel Health Campus will be able to resume as normal?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will hand over to Paul Forden to say a few words, but I will say that we are still working with the South Metropolitan Health Service and we are still working with the contractor to ensure that we can do that. I am hoping to have an update while we are in estimates; if that comes through, I will make the chamber aware of the exact date and when we can start bringing certain services in line. I am just looking at my notes. The writing is tiny! Disinfecting is still ongoing and there is an environmental clean happening today. As I said, we are hoping to have a clearer time frame while we are in the chamber, and if that is forthcoming, I will make the member aware of it. We are still doing births and a number of services are still continuing, but I will hand to Paul Forden to give a bit more detail.

Mr P. Forden: As the minister has said, a number of services are continuing. A number of areas were identified as high or medium risk. Those areas are not being used for patient care. The obstetrics unit was deemed to be low risk, as was one of the theatres, so we have been able to continue with an obstetric service, which has been very beneficial to our local mothers. The emergency department was deemed to be a medium risk; therefore, for the course of this week, we have moved the ambulance admissions away from Peel to broadly Rockingham and Fiona Stanley Hospital. We have moved the emergency department for walk-in patients into the north part of the campus, which is the outpatient area. The vast majority of patients who attend the emergency department still actually attend the site. Only around 30 per cent of patients are brought in by ambulance, so 70 per cent of patients are still attending.

We are waiting for the type of mould to be identified. It is a long process; it can take several days for that to be analysed in the labs and identified. In the meantime, we have cleaned a number of areas already. The emergency department, the Barker Ward and a second ward have already been cleaned in anticipation. That means that once we have identified the mould, we will be able to assess whether it is a type that will allow us to engage services again following the cleaning process. There are plans in place for that to be enacted as soon as we have that decision.

Ms A. SANDERSON: As Mr Forden has outlined, we are just waiting on sample results, and the time frame for reopening will depend on those results.

Ms L. METTAM: Given that, are we anticipating it will be in the next few days?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We are anticipating it, but it depends on the type of mould. We should get those results today. We will have a time line today.

Ms L. METTAM: Was the mould a result of a maintenance issue? What was the cause of the mould and how did this happen? Given that it is a public hospital facility, what responsibility does the government take for the chaos that has happened over the last few days?

Ms A. SANDERSON: At this point in time, our absolute focus is on remediation and getting patients back in the hospital. I am not looking at this point to apportion blame. The Department of Health—both public health under the Chief Health Officer and environmental health—is working with the South Metropolitan Health Service, which is working with the contractor to remediate the issue as soon as possible. It demonstrates the exceptionally high standards that are required in Western Australia and monitored by the Licensing and Accreditation Regulatory Unit. Our facilities are required to meet very high standards and they are safe. The focus right now is everyone hands on deck, working to remediate the issue.

[10.20 am]

Ms L. METTAM: On page 301 of volume 1 of budget paper No 2, paragraph 37.2 refers to Joondalup Health Campus. Does the \$269.4 million for the redevelopment of Peel Health Campus include funding for the Joondalup medi-hotel?

The CHAIR: Member, can you please repeat the question? You said “Peel” instead of “Joondalup”.

Ms L. METTAM: Sorry—Joondalup; I have Peel on my mind! Does the \$269.4 million for the redevelopment of Joondalup Health Campus include funding for the Joondalup medi-hotel?

Ms A. SANDERSON: That funding is for the stage 2 upgrades of Joondalup Health Campus, which is a significant development—far more significant than a medi-hotel. As I previously said, in discussions with the operator, the view was that more investment was required in some of the other services at the health campus. The upgrades to Joondalup Health Campus—both stages 1 and 2—have been very well accepted and celebrated by the local community. That funding envelope for stage 2 includes a 102-bed mental health unit, which will include 55 beds to meet additional demand, and that is a doubling of the number of existing mental health beds at Joondalup; 12 new emergency department beds, comprising 10 bays and two isolation rooms; a specialised behavioural assessment urgent care clinic located within the expanded emergency department; refurbishment of the emergency assessment unit located within the expanded ED; a new 112-bed public ward block, comprising a 30-bed medical–surgical ward, a 16-bed cardiac care unit, of which six beds are additional and 10 are relocated, and 66 shelled beds to meet future demand; a theatre; a new cardiac catheterisation lab; a refurbished discharge lounge; increased public and staff parking; and upgraded staff facilities. We have also initiated the stroke clinic, which has been incredibly well supported by the northern suburbs community. Our commitment and investment in our northern suburbs health care is significant and ongoing.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the Joondalup medi-hotel project likely to happen at all or has it been canned completely?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We continue to have discussions with the provider about the implementation of the medi-hotel. It is still absolutely a live possibility, but the priority investment has gone into all those important services that I just outlined.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 314 of volume 1 of budget paper No 2 and the medi-hotel in Murdoch. I note there has been some progress on this medi-hotel. When will this facility be completed and receive patients?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The builder and developer are expecting practical completion later this year. They do not have an exact date. Obviously, they are still really constrained by construction labour shortages. It is very difficult to put a commissioning date on it, but it is our ambition that the medi-hotel will be taking patients before winter next year.

Ms L. METTAM: How many beds will the facility contain? I am sure that has already been announced. How many patients are expected to utilise the medi-hotel each year and how many will this provide for Fiona Stanley Hospital?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Could the member repeat the second part of her question?

Ms L. METTAM: How many patient days will this provide or offset at Fiona Stanley Hospital?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The medi-hotel will have 80 beds that the state will contract for—20 mental health and 60 general medical beds. I will hand to Paul Forden, our chief executive of the South Metropolitan Health Service, for more detail.

Mr P. Forden: As the minister said, the facility will have 80 beds. The contractor is planning to run it at an occupancy level of 80 per cent. Therefore, it is anticipated to have 64 patients on average at any one time. Clearly, that will fluctuate based on patient demand. We anticipate the majority of those patients will come from Fiona Stanley Hospital, but the service will be accessible to all public hospitals.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the minister anticipate that some of those beds will come from the women's and babies' hospital as well?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Construction will not be completed until 2029, so we are not factoring it in at this point. As Paul Forden said, they can come from around the system.

The CHAIR: Before we move on to a new question, I would like to request a short five-minute comfort break. Are members okay with that or would they like to proceed? Yes. We will reconvene at 10.35 am.

Meeting suspended from 10.27 to 10.35 am

The CHAIR: Members, are there any questions?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 313 and the Tom Price Hospital redevelopment. Can the minister advise what the total cost will be for this project? Is it all in the budget?

Ms A. SANDERSON: There is a significant cost escalation for Tom Price for a couple of reasons. The approved budget for the Tom Price Hospital redevelopment is \$32.8 million and includes \$20 million from Rio Tinto. That is to provide a resuscitation bay, two treatment bays, a mental health assessment room, a procedure room and four inpatient beds, as well as an outpatients' area, imaging, pathology and dental. This will be insufficient to deliver the project, given construction cost increases and a range of other issues. We are undertaking ongoing planning around the cost escalation to work out how we can deliver that hospital within a reasonable envelope that is value for money for taxpayers, but we are still very committed to it. We are also continuing to work with our partner, Rio Tinto. We will soon have a plan to go back to the Expenditure Review Committee to continue with that development.

At the moment, it is very difficult to get construction companies to build, particularly in regional areas, for a price that is reasonable and acceptable to the taxpayer. We are very constrained currently by the market, but we are still working through those issues. I might refer to Rob Pulsford from WA Country Health Service, who might be able to give the member a bit more detail.

Mr R. Pulsford: We are continuing to work to explore value-for-money opportunities. At the same time, there is a parallel process. The intention is to construct the new facility on a new site in the township of Tom Price, so we are still working to secure that. The land is secured, but we are also doing the early feasibility and the land assembly work so the project can continue. Once we have a funded solution in place, we will be right to progress with it.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I note the minister's comments about the challenges that are being experienced. It was expected to begin by the end of last year. Could the minister provide an update on when the expected construction time frame is likely to commence and what the new construction time frame might be? When would the minister like to see it completed? Is there an idea? I understand that the minister will say "as soon as possible", but is there a time line within government? That is how departments work.

Ms A. SANDERSON: We have to overcome a range of issues before we can settle on an agreed time line, and that is because we do not have the final scope of funding. We are working through that process, and we are working through ways that we can deliver it for a lower cost and what the final scope of the project may be, noting what we have committed to deliver so far. I would have liked to start exactly on time but, as I said, we are in an incredibly constrained environment.

I expect I will get asked a number of questions about the smaller regional projects. I have said this publicly: we committed to a range of projects before COVID, and then when COVID hit, we committed to a range of additional projects as part of the COVID-recovery program because we were expecting the economy to be decimated, as economies were around the world in a multitude of countries. That has not been the case in Western Australia. In fact, we now have an incredibly stretched construction market, and we are challenged, too. Companies are challenged by the cost and availability of labour and the cost of materials. I have taken the decision to prioritise the big regional developments that have an expansion of services and an overall gain to the community from that expansion of services. I have prioritised getting those big regional hospital developments going and getting the construction companies locked in and building. We continue to work through the challenges of those smaller sites. I expect I will be asked about Laverton, Mullewa and Tom Price, and we continue to work with companies to make it attractive for them to bid and tender for that work.

[10.40 am]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister went through the scope of what has been committed. That is not going to change, is it?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No, we will deliver what we have committed to deliver. We are examining how we deliver it.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Has the government gone back to Rio Tinto to ask it to increase its contribution to the project?

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is certainly an option and is something I will take up. The government is having discussions with resources companies more broadly around contributions to various projects, so that has to be done in a coordinated and strategic way.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 312 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. When is the request for proposal process for the Geraldton Health Campus expected to be complete?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We expect the request for proposal, the next stage of the tender process, by the end of this month, with an anticipated contract awarded by October this year.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is the department still targeting construction to commence mid-October?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The contract.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: So construction will therefore not commence mid-2023?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No; I certainly did not say that. It is not unreasonable that it would start this year, and that is the feedback we have had from the tenderers in this process.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Okay. Does the minister anticipate that practical completion will be by mid-2026, as outlined in the expression of interest documents?

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is dependent on the tender. That is still realistic, but is determined by the tender in discussions with the final tenderer. I confirm that all the planning and discussion so far indicates that construction will commence in the last quarter of 2023.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 297 of budget paper No 2, significant issues impacting the agency. Paragraph 9 indicates that WA Health continues to address the multifaceted root causes of ambulance ramping and refers to the ministerial task force, led by the Minister for Health. How many FTEs does that task force contain?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The task force itself does not employ people.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the task force made up of people in existing roles? How does it work?

Ms A. SANDERSON: A range of work is occurring across the system. The governance of that work, the emergency access reform, is the ministerial task force chaired by me. The people who attend the task force are the board chairs of the three major metropolitan health service providers, the chief executives of the three major metropolitan HSPs, Treasury, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, staff from my office as Minister for Health, and staff from the office of the Premier; Treasurer. We already have people in existing roles, certainly in the development of strategy, budget planning and implementation. That work is led by the department for the emergency access reform, in conjunction with HSPs in each of their areas.

[10.50 am]

Ms L. METTAM: Is there a supporting secretariat that supports the role of the task force; and, if so, where do the people in that secretariat come from?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is supported by the Department of Health; it is not a cabinet committee.

Ms L. METTAM: What level of ramping would indicate that the task force is achieving its goals?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will try to give a constructive answer to what was not a very constructive question.

Ms L. METTAM: Is that not the goal of the task force?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The role of the task force is essentially to manage a symptom of various pressure points in the system—that is, ambulance ramping or extended transfer of care. I have said repeatedly that there is no quick fix to this issue and no jurisdiction in the world has successfully managed to get on top of it. I consider success to be a downward trend and a downward trajectory. We cannot turn it off overnight. No-one has done that and no-one will because we see peaks and troughs in demand across the system. Various issues arise from time to time. For example, we have closed Peel Health Campus to admissions, so that will put pressure on the system. It is about building more robustness in the system and working with clinicians on the ground, hearing their ideas and implementing their ideas. Ultimately, it is about that downward trajectory. That is what we have seen so far this year with the downward trajectory—the ramping figures have been lower than the year before. That is a realistic and certainly ongoing ambition.

Ms L. METTAM: Can I just confirm that the goal of the task force is to reduce ambulance ramping?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is one of the goals because it is called the ramping task force. Its goal is certainly not to increase ramping. The aim is to reduce pressure on our emergency departments. We do that in a range of ways. We do that by working through the entire system, not just in the emergency department. I think it is acknowledged that it is not necessarily just the emergency department that needs to reform or shift in the way it is working, or be resourced differently. It relates to various parts of the system, including how we discharge long-stay patients, for example. I note that the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine is very supportive of the task force. It was invited to present to the task force, which it did. We have worked very closely with the college, as we have with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, St John Ambulance, Ramsay Health Care, St John of God and all our partners in health. Although there are permanent members, we invite our healthcare partners in to work with the system so we have system solutions to local issues.

Ms L. METTAM: The previous health minister described 1 000 hours of ramping as a horror story. Will the goal of the task force be to get ramping hours well below that figure? I think last month's figure was over 3 000 hours.

Ms A. SANDERSON: The goal of the task force is to see ramping figures come down. That will not happen overnight. As I said, no jurisdiction has successfully eliminated ramping because demand peaks and troughs. The goal of the task force is to work with the system—work with all our HSPs and also our partners in primary and alternative care—so that the emergency department is not the only option. That is one of the goals of the task force. This is about system-wide reform. We are undertaking significant system-wide reform.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: I refer to the emergency access reform—the same item number. I note that through her advocacy, the minister was successful in securing a \$75 million investment to reduce pressure on emergency departments. In addition to the task force and all the discussions that take place at the task force level, another \$75 million will be invested as a result of this budget. Can the minister explain her strategy to reduce ambulance ramping in a bit more detail and how staff in our hospitals—those on the front line who have a genuine understanding of what is going on—have been able to participate in the strategy?

[Mrs L.A. Munday took the chair.]

Ms A. SANDERSON: I thank the member for the question. The ramping task force is essentially pulling together the work that is going on across the system to ease pressure points in our system. This budget provided an additional \$75 million to address some of those pressures on emergency departments. This is on top of previous funding in the last budget and the *Government mid-year financial projections statement*. The \$75 million includes \$8.2 million to expand the work of the teams within hospitals that are focused on eliminating barriers for care and developing that system-wide reform. As anyone who has had a parent in a tertiary hospital would know, often we have to advocate and keep things moving to make sure they are getting tests and so on and so forth.

Another \$7 million has been committed to progress phase 1 of the state health operations centre—an incredibly important part of our system—which will bring together all the HSPs, the Royal Flying Doctor Service and St John Ambulance, co-located with the police, to provide that central coordination around our health system. Also, \$7.3 million has been committed to provide greater options for patients in aged-care facilities to receive geriatrician-led care and models of care in the community. As we know, older Australians are spending longer in hospital. We have included in this provision \$3.4 million to expand health in a virtual environment, HIVE, which is currently run out of Royal Perth Hospital. It supports patients who have been discharged from Royal Perth Hospital with ongoing monitoring and provides support for residential facilities. It will help make decisions locally for those residents and help family, along with local support workers, make decisions. That is genuinely reducing readmissions to hospital.

There is also \$3.9 million in the budget to extend and expand the integrated older adult model in the North Metropolitan Health Service. The Mental Health Commission has extended the WA Country Health Service mental health emergency telehealth uplift and community treatment. This is consistent with the strategy that was set by the task force following consultation with clinicians and staff who deliver care across our system. They were also strong advocates for developing the WA virtual emergency department, a new community-based service that provides people with better access to care closer to where they live. The early signs are promising. We are seeing an average reduction of 25 per cent. We know that the ramping figure will rise as the flu season approaches in winter, when we always see natural pressure on our emergency departments and our hospitals. The service certainly has strong endorsement from teams in hospitals and those working on the front line. Even the Australian Medical Association, which held a summit last year, which I attended, was very happy with the increased access to alternative care pathways. Many of its members had some really constructive ideas. The Australasian College for Emergency Medicine, My Aged Care and the Health Consumers' Council of WA also support the work of the task force.

Ms L. METTAM: I referred to the 1 000 hours of ramping that the minister's predecessor described as a horror story. When does the minister anticipate that the task force will be able to at least achieve the goal of going under that monthly ramping figure?

[11.00 am]

Ms A. SANDERSON: The member is simplifying an incredibly complex problem and challenge. Hon Kim Hames, the former Liberal Minister for Health, has been on the record as saying this is an incredibly complex challenge and I cannot set arbitrary dates and targets because people's health care and lives are at stake. We are also contending with, as every jurisdiction around the world is, an average length of stay that is 0.5 days longer. That is hundreds of bed days a year. That is because people are sicker. We are not comparing apples with apples when we make that comparison. We are absolutely not comparing apples with apples and it is insulting to the healthcare staff, quite frankly, to make such simplistic comparisons.

People are sick. People are coming in very unwell; they are staying longer and needing more speciality care; our system is providing that for them and we will continue to do that. We want to provide that speciality care outside a hospital environment so they do not have to be in a hospital to receive it. That is absolutely the right reform. When we talk to healthcare professionals on the ground, we hear that this is the stuff that they are passionate about. The stuff that keeps them going is providing the right care for patients when they need it.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 297 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and significant issue 5. Given the *Sustainable health review: Final report to the Western Australian government* was released in 2019, how many of the recommendations have been adopted and how many are still to be implemented?

Ms A. SANDERSON: This is a transformation. The sustainable health review is not a project.

The CHAIR: Leader of the Liberal Party, can you be more specific in your question, please.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I am happy to continue responding; thank you, chair. This is a transformational program, not a project. We do not put deadlines on it. If the member were to ask any members of the oversight implementation committee, that would be their view. That includes consumers, people with lived experience, clinicians, primary care workers, so on and so forth. I met with them yesterday and we had a great discussion. This is a transformational program that is around improving prevention, different models of care and digitisation. It is sound and it is absolutely the plan that needs to be implemented, but it is done through a transformational and cultural change. That is what is required. At the end of last year, we refocused on six priorities. I think it is fair to say it is a large piece of work, and progress was not as pointy in some areas as some members of the implementation committee felt it should be, and they wanted to see a greater prioritisation. They went through a prioritisation process and we announced those six priority areas in November 2022.

Those areas are improving timely access to outpatient service; implementing models of care for people with complex conditions who are frequent presenters to hospital; implementing a new funding and commissioning model supporting new models of care and joint commissioning; investing in a phased 10-year digitisation; building a system-wide culture of courage, innovation and accountability; and building capacity in workplace planning to develop the health and social care workforce for the future. I think we can see that the theme in all those is the pressure on the system. It is around the increasing acuity and complexity of patients in our system and the sustainability of the system. Much of the work that we are delivering through the ramping task force is delivering these outcomes.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to provide and outline which recommendations of the original ones proposed in 2019 have been implemented? I know the minister has said that progress has not been pointy. Does that mean that we will be waiting for some time for the implementation of those recommendations?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I think the member fundamentally misunderstands what the sustainable health review is. I think the term “review” is probably not applicable anymore because it is not a review; it is a transformational program. I think that I have highlighted those areas of priority, but we are implementing in various ways the intent of the sustainable health review across the system and it is a transformational project that will remain in place forever.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the minister think there might need to be some better communication with clinicians and health staff about the new approach to the sustainable health review given that there is a lot of frustration that the recommendations are not being implemented? The fact that the government is unable to commit to the implementation of the recommendations made in 2019, I suggest, only adds to that concern.

Ms A. SANDERSON: The government has accepted all the recommendations of the sustainable health review. It is fundamentally wrong for the opposition to say that we have not committed to them.

Ms L. METTAM: Has the government implemented them?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is a transformation of a system. It is a 10-year rebalancing of the system. One of the time frames is a 10-year digitisation plan. I recommend that the member reads the sustainable health review. The sustainable health review is an ongoing culture shift and transformation. We have prioritised six reforms, which I have just outlined, that will help support our system and patients with the post-COVID reality. Essentially, every health jurisdiction—certainly within Australia, but internationally as well—is having the same experience: people are coming in sicker, staying longer and needing more care. There are lots of hypotheses about this but some of it is deferred care, whether it is because of a fear of COVID or no access during COVID, not necessarily in Western Australia, but in other states and territories. These are the priorities and ongoing work that will help support it.

We are always improving timely access to patient services. We are always improving and implementing models of care for people who have complex conditions and are frequent presenters. The digitalisation investment is a 10-year phased plan, and we are always building capability in our workforce. The recommendations are not tick-box exercises.

Ms L. METTAM: Would the minister anticipate that the recommendations will be implemented over 10 years?

Ms A. SANDERSON: They are implemented every day across various areas of our system.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to “Workforce Attraction and Retention” on page 116 of budget paper No 3. The first dot point states —

a targeted payment of up to \$12,000 over three years for HECS–HELP debt relief for up to 350 newly qualified nurses and midwives commencing employment in regional Western Australia in 2023–24 ...

Given these positions are funded to commence from 1 July, how many applications have been received to date and how many nurses have been offered a position?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The budget has not passed Parliament; I make that point. These will be considered as part of the next intake of graduates and there are timing factors around when that occurs. I might ask Rob Pulsford to answer in more detail, but I will say I am very proud of this really good initiative that this government is delivering for regional healthcare. We do spend a lot of money on agency staff to keep services running. We do run services. We are not funded appropriately by the commonwealth, frankly. I am sure as regional members, opposition members will agree that we are not funded appropriately by the commonwealth to run the kind of regional and remote services that we do in Western Australia. What is considered regional in Victoria is not the same as regional in Western Australia and they are considered the same under the commonwealth funding model. It is fundamentally wrong and significantly disadvantages us. Activity-based funding does not work for small hospitals. It does not work for nurse-led hospitals. We subsidise significantly, as is right, to provide as much regional health care as we can in our local regions. We provide a range of incentives and supports for our regional healthcare workers but it is becoming increasingly difficult. I think people are making decisions to move—big, life decisions, post-COVID all over the country around where they want to locate. This is one of those supports in which we are saying to people, “Hey, come and try regional medicine and we know you’ll probably fall in love with it and you will stay.” It also locks them into a contract for three years. If they want to receive the full balance of that HECS, they need to stay in a regional centre. They will be considered as part of the next intake of grants. I hope it is a great success because I would like to expand it significantly.

[11.10 am]

The CHAIR: Will the minister refer to Mr Pulsford?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Do you have anything you want to add?

Mr R. Pulsford: Thanks, minister. Recruitment and retention of key staff and nursing staff in particular across country Western Australia is an ongoing challenge for us. Many pieces make up that puzzle. The regional graduate incentive for HECS is just one of those pieces. This incentive will be available for up to 350 newly qualified nurses and midwives who are appointed in a position in regional Western Australia. Priority will be given to 75 hard-to-staff locations across country WA where they will be given the support and supervision that all newly qualified nurses and midwives need and expect, which we provide across business right now.

Ms L. METTAM: How many current vacancies are there amongst nurses and midwives across regional Western Australia?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I request the member puts that question on notice. I could not give that information now and it varies from day to day.

Ms L. METTAM: Minister, this is obviously a significant issue and we welcome the commitment that has been made. Does the minister have a rough idea of the number of vacancies for nurses and midwives? Does she have a general figure?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I am not going to give the member a rough idea. She needs to put the question on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: Can that be provided by supplementary information?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No, we are not providing supplementary information.

The CHAIR: I think the minister has made her view clear.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister spoke about the Victorian model, which is paying \$16 500 compared with the \$12 000 that the minister is proposing. How did the department come to the figure of \$12 000?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We consider \$12 000 a significant investment in someone. Victoria is throwing a lot of cash around and it is entitled to do that. Every state is incentivising in its own way. We consider \$12 000 to be a very significant investment in someone moving to regional Western Australia and it is absolutely right. We also provide housing and other regional incentives. In fact, Victoria’s incentives are relatively late to the game. Western Australia has had them since the early 2000s so we have been incentivising people to work in regional areas for many years longer than Victoria.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister let me know how the payment will be delivered? Will it be a cash payment every 12 months or will it go directly to paying off the HECS debt?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It will be broken up into three payments. I do not have the exact numbers but it will be essentially spread over the three years of their employment, with the bulk of it towards the end of the three years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: If someone graduated the year before the minister announced this project and they do not have a HECS debt, are there any other incentive payments for those people to go to the regions?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes, there are regional incentive payments. It is weighted on the region and based on the MMM—Modified Monash Model—which is the rating that the commonwealth makes. They vary from place to place depending on where they are. There are regional payments. There is the critical retention payment, which is a payment for staff working in hard-to-staff places. That has been very successful, certainly in keeping services

open over the Christmas holidays when a lot of people want to take leave. Some services were going to be really challenged to be provided. Around \$15 million overall is allocated for these regional incentives. We are growing our FTE in regional Western Australia but there are still shortages.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister confirm whether the Peel or Mandurah regions will be included in this incentive payment?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No, Peel is not included at this stage but we can look at it.

Ms L. METTAM: Can I confirm that the minister will reconsider Peel's exclusion from the HECS program?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Peel is not included in any of the regional incentives because the incentives are for the WA Country Health Service. We will look at it. Certainly, if the program is successful in regional areas, we will look at how we might implement it in the metropolitan area. Peel is not included in any of the regional incentives because it is for the WACHS staffing areas like Balgo, Halls Creek, Fitzgerald, Warburton—regional and remote areas.

Ms L. METTAM: When does the minister anticipate providing further clarity about Peel and whether it will be able to benefit from that workforce?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is not included in this tranche. We will consider it in future tranches.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister referred in one of her press releases, a bit like she did a minute ago, to priority locations. How do priority locations work for this program?

Ms A. SANDERSON: As I just outlined, it is based on the commonwealth's MMM model.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is that about the larger regional centres? Are they centres further away from the metropolitan area? Could the minister explain priority locations in a bit more detail?

Ms A. SANDERSON: First of all, the HECS payment will go to every WA Country Health Service site but we will prioritise harder-to-staff sites. The MMM is a commonwealth rating that takes into consideration the delivery of health care, the remoteness, the demographics, the need and so on. We base much of our planning provisions on that rating.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Which categories of the MMM will be eligible?

Ms A. SANDERSON: All of them.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister able to provide as supplementary information a list of the locations determined to be eligible?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Every WACHS location is eligible.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 307 of budget paper No 2. It is under mental health services. I appreciate that we are going to the Mental Health Commission next but I assume this is within Health. I note that the service includes eating disorder programs. How many episodes of care were provided for eating disorders in 2022–23?

[11.20 am]

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is a question the member needs to put on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister at least provide that as supplementary information—that is, episodes of care for eating disorders for 2022–23?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I suggest the member put the question on notice. That particular episode of care cannot necessarily be unpacked because eating disorders are complex and often occur with a multitude of either medical or psychiatric disorders. I will find out, but I am not sure whether they are designated in the system as that episode of care like a cardiac episode, for example. I ask the member put the question on notice, and craft it carefully so that she gets an answer.

Ms L. METTAM: How many dedicated beds for eating disorder treatment does WA currently have?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Western Australia has a range of inpatient beds, and patients both under and over 16 years of age are treated in inpatient beds across the system when required.

Ms L. METTAM: How many dedicated beds are there for patients aged under 16 and over 16?

Ms A. SANDERSON: There is no limit as such because patients under 16 years of age are treated at Perth Children's Hospital. If they require inpatient treatment, they are treated at Perth Children's Hospital. There is not a limit.

Ms L. METTAM: Surely the minister, as Minister for Health; Mental Health, must have an idea of how many beds are set aside for eating disorders at Perth Children's Hospital.

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is not necessarily how demand is managed in the hospital. If someone critically requires an inpatient bed at Perth Children's Hospital for an eating disorder or any other condition, they will find one.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to provide an idea of how many eating disorder beds are utilised over a 12-month period? It is extraordinary that the minister cannot answer what should be a pretty simple question.

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is a detailed data question that needs to be put on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: I assume that the number of beds dedicated to eating disorders would in many respects shape how treatment of eating disorders is funded in the budget. Surely, this information is readily available as part of the estimates process.

Ms A. SANDERSON: There is no question that the demand for eating disorder services has significantly increased over the last two years, and it has increased over the supply, both private and public. There is no question that that demand has increased. Generally, the provision of inpatient eating disorder support for patients under the age of 16 is done across the system, but it is done through wards 4A and 5A at Perth Children's Hospital, where there are appropriate medical and psychiatric supports for those children. We have also made a commitment to expand the inpatient paediatric eating disorder service. The best supports that people can get are in the community through intensive treatment and support. That is why we have services across the metropolitan area with our intensive outpatient treatments. Services in the North Metropolitan Health Service and South Metropolitan Health Service are up and running, and East Metropolitan Health Service recently received \$8.9 million from the commonwealth and is in the process of getting its services and treatments up and running as well, so there will be a complete service there. There is demand from inpatients, and they are accommodated as much as possible in Perth Children's Hospital, and we will continue to do that. It is not appropriate to expect specific bed numbers and episodes of care from the estimates process; that is a question on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: How many beds are in wards 4A and 5A at Perth Children's Hospital?

Ms A. SANDERSON: There are a number of beds, but we do not have dedicated beds as such; it is based on need. If there is a high need for inpatient beds, they will be taken by eating disorder patients. If there is a low need, they will be taken by other patients. There is flexibility with those beds. We do not close beds because they might be needed. If someone needs a bed, they get a bed, and we configure around that.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister stated that there would be an expansion of the inpatient eating disorder facility. Can the minister say how many beds it will be expanded from and to?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I correct my former comments. Although there is not a dedicated paediatric eating disorder unit, we understand that there is a service gap and we are looking at options to create that unit. Children who need a bed for an eating disorder support at Perth Children's Hospital are largely accommodated within the bed stock of wards 4A and 5A.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to describe what the size of that gap is—how many beds we are talking about?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No, I cannot off the top of my head, but I acknowledge that there is significant demand around eating disorders in the community.

Ms L. METTAM: Will the minister be able to provide that by supplementary information?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I suggest the member put the question on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister talked about significant demand in addressing the problem. It is essential that the minister can define it, so how significant has demand been over the last 12 months?

Ms A. SANDERSON: In the last 12 months, demand has dropped slightly, although it is still high. The eating disorder service outpatient program, which is the publicly run youth program through the child and adolescent mental health service received 179 referrals in 2022 compared with 189 in 2021. The age range of those referrals was from nine years and nine months to 17 years and nine months.

Ms L. METTAM: So demand has dropped but there is still a significant gap in meeting demand.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I do not have in front of me the average wait time for that unit, but it is working to meet demand as much as possible. It is also significant demand in the private system as well. Eating disorder specialists are very hard to come by, they are in very high demand across every jurisdiction, and we continue to recruit as we can.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to provide by way of supplementary information what the wait time may be to see a specialist in the public health system?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I suggest the member puts the question on notice.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 312 of budget paper No 2 and the line item "Meekatharra Hospital". Can the minister advise what work, if any, has been completed on this project?

[11.30 am]

Ms A. SANDERSON: The business case is complete, and, like every other development, particularly regional, we are constrained by current construction market conditions. However, we appointed a lead consultant team in April this year and a business case endorsed a program that needed to be revised as part of the project definition planning. That commenced in May. The Department of Finance has engaged a consultant. It is determined that the building site could fall within a registered Aboriginal heritage place. Therefore, the consultant is in consultation with traditional owners and their representatives. The functional brief is complete.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister just mentioned a revised project definition plan. Could she advise what was changed from the initial project?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is not about the scope of services; that will not change. It is about whether it falls in the scope of a registered Aboriginal heritage site.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, minister. Can the minister tell me the time frame for project completion?

Ms A. SANDERSON: That will be determined on the tender, and we are not at that stage yet.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can I confirm that it is not at tender?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No; we are not at tender. We anticipate the tender will be awarded potentially early next year.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Will the minister provide the project definition plan for the hospital?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is not something that is generally provided because there is a range of commercial information in it. No; I will not provide that.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 316 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, which shows that the number of FTEs has increased from 43 846 in 2021–22 to 45 867 in 2023–24, which is a total increase of over 2 000 FTEs. On page 310, we see about 230 of these additional staff were for policy and corporate services. Page 311 indicates 144 of these were for support services. Can the minister confirm that 18 per cent of the new employees for the Department of Health are for bureaucratic positions that have no clinical role?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will hand over to Mr Rob Anderson to outline in more detail, but support staff are incredibly important for clinical staff. We do not want clinical staff making appointments, chasing outpatients, moving people between wards and arranging radiology. Clinical staff cannot operate to their full extent without administrative staff. Quite frankly, I think this is a red herring that is thrown around —

Mr D.J. KELLY: Insulting.

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is insulting —

Ms L. METTAM: It is one in five staff.

Ms A. SANDERSON: There are ward clerks who manage patient records. They largely take administrative duties off clinical staff; that is their purpose. There is an uplift for COVID staff as well. I will hand to Rob Anderson to give more detail.

Mr R. Anderson: Thank you, minister, and through the chair, it is not as simple as suggesting these staff are bureaucratic backroom staff. A lot of these staff are on major projects such as those we have discussed—the emergency access response program, which supports clinical staff across the system. There were numerous staff, as the minister said, supporting the COVID response during that period. There is also a significant uplift in things such as agency staff usage and leave, which all contribute to FTE. Once we take out overtime, leave and so forth, the actual growth in FTE in administrative services across the entire system over a three-year period is less than six per cent.

But just to recap, there are things included such as the emergency access response program, capital projects that we have discussed at length today, and then there is the enormous digital program across the system as well. All these programs of work require significant administrative staff to operate.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister advise how many nurses short each area of health service is from its approved number of nurse FTE?

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is a very detailed data question and it depends on any one day. I suggest the member put that on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to provide that by supplementary information?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No; I am not.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister advise how many doctors short each area of health is from the approved number of FTE?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Again, that is a very detailed data question for a very large health system spread across a large area, and it is different on any one day. I would suggest the member put that on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: To clarify again, is the minister able to provide it by supplementary information?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is more appropriate on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: What is being done to address the shocking shortage of paediatric staff that is contributing to wait time blowouts of over 18 months?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I missed the second part of the question. What was the last sentence?

Ms L. METTAM: It was about the wait time blowouts we are seeing for paediatric services.

Ms A. SANDERSON: The member said something right at the end.

Ms L. METTAM: It was wait times of over 18 months.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Paediatric workforce development is not within the power or scope of the state government. That is with the federal government and the colleges. Yes, I would like a lot more paediatricians, psychologists and mental health nurses. Much of that workforce development is outside the influence of the state government. That is why we supported the Select Committee into Child Development Services with a specific focus on workforce development and what role universities and medical colleges have played and can play in improving access to those specialties. When it comes to the public system, the Child and Adolescent Health Service has doubled the number of developmental paediatric registrars, so we have doubled the number of paediatric registrars in the CDS service specifically. Of course, there are paediatricians across the hospital because it is a paediatric hospital.

The Child Development Service undertakes a range of mechanisms and blitzes to get people through and seen and assessed as quickly as possible, but it is overwhelmed with referrals. Essentially, for every person that is seen, there is another referral through the door. In some part, that is driven by the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the insatiable demand for funded plans and paediatric assessments for those plans. That has put enormous strain on both public and private health. We hear from both private and public paediatricians that complexity is growing and the waitlists are long, but they are essentially having to manage and monitor people for a long time.

We are employing more people to make sure that people can get more access through the public service, but the shocking shortage, if you like, is an issue across a number of specialties, including psychiatric. Nationally, there is a lot of discussion at national health ministers' meetings about meeting with the various medical colleges and talking to them about how they manage their intake and training programs, and what the federal and state governments need to do to support them to do that—that is, provide the placements in the state systems. It is complex and it is largely outside our influence, but it is something we are very invested in.

[11.40 am]

Ms L. METTAM: The minister referred to having doubled the number of paediatric registrars. Does that refer to the number of registrars in the system or the number of positions? Over what period has the number been doubled?

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is for the Child and Adolescent Health Service; that does not include the WA Country Health Service.

Ms L. METTAM: With respect to getting more psychiatrists and other specialists into the system, I would imagine that health service providers have a role in supporting their placements as registrars in training.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes, they do, and they play a really important role. It is not just registrars; it is doctors in training. But there also needs to be transparency from the colleges about the number of placements they require. This is not the case for all, but some colleges do not provide those figures. I would ask the question about how many people want to be child psychiatrists, and we would work to meet that as much as we can. It should not be limited to the placements, but there needs to be transparency from the colleges.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister confident that state health is meeting the demand for placements when it comes to the pool of graduating psychiatrists?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is different for every specialty, so I could not give the member a blanket answer. It is very different for every specialty. I will ask Dr Shirley Bowen to make a few comments.

Dr S. Bowen: I thank the minister. The North Metropolitan Health Service hosts the psychiatric training service for the state, now in concert with WACHS, to come in the following year, and we have a process under which registrars are recruited and their posts are allocated ahead every year. There are plenty of posts available for the registrars that we have looking for work. Of course, our issue is recruiting from interstate—pulling new people into our state—but we have plenty of posts available for them to train in.

Ms A. SANDERSON: For psychiatry, there are more posts than people.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister advise how many hospitals have nurse-to-patient ratios in place?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The first cab off the rank will be Perth Children's Hospital emergency department. As I outlined previously, we have received the draft audit. That is progressing well and we anticipate that to be in place for winter this year. There is a working group with union members and staff representatives on the floor who are helping to drive that. The current independent analysis completed by Deloitte is that we are largely meeting those ratios now.

Under the current agreement, we have to give six weeks' notice of rosters. Certainly, in the Australian Nursing Federation agreement, there has to be six weeks' notice, which is very reasonable—people want to know what their roster is—so we actually cannot implement it until the end of that six-week period. We are getting into winter, but we are working towards it.

Ms L. METTAM: What was the cost of the independent inquiry by Deloitte into current staffing levels at WA hospitals, and when will that report be released publicly?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I suggest that the member put the question about costing on notice.

With respect to releasing the report, at this stage, it is a draft report. The department has been trying to organise a meeting with the ANF to run through the results of that draft report. That has not been able to occur. We continue to try to do that.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify: is the hold-up due to the department trying to liaise with the ANF over the report?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The government is committed to rolling out ratios, full stop. Despite this being part of an industrial agreement and the ANF not signing the industrial agreement, the government is very committed to this reform. It is a very important reform in our system. It will make us a very attractive employment prospect and will really help manage the workload for nurses, and this government wants to do that. We want to support nurses in their workload. We will roll out ratios and we will not be delayed in doing it. We would like the ANF to be part of that implementation. I know that we are continuing to meet with the ANF through the commission to seek an outcome to that agreement, but we will push ahead and roll out ratios, because it is important for the system and the reform that we are committed to.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister confirm when she believes the Deloitte report will be released publicly?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I do not think I have ever made a commitment to release the report publicly. Currently, it is only in draft form, so I am not prepared to make a commitment at this point.

Ms L. METTAM: I have one further question on the Deloitte report. Is there a reason the minister will not make the report public?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I have never refused nor committed to make the report public. I have not seen it. I am not going to make a commitment on a report that I have not yet seen. It is still a draft report.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 295 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the critical response payment.

The CHAIR: Is that three lines from the bottom?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes. Can the minister provide some detail on the critical response payment? What is it and who is it paid to?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes, I can. Essentially, this is to provide a financial incentive to staff to maintain service operation in hard-to-staff regions. It is in two parts: there is the critical response payment and the acute response payment. It has been a key factor in stabilising a number of the vulnerable services that we have across Western Australia. There is an allocation of around \$15 million for those hard-to-staff regions. We are certainly working to develop a more permanent solution for some of the hardest-to-staff areas. I will ask Rob Pulsford to outline a bit more.

[11.50 am]

Mr R. Pulsford: Just to add to that, the temporary regional incentive program has been a really important strategy to help WA Country Health Service maintain the staffing workforce it needs. There are two key planks to that strategy: one is to incentivise redeployments of nursing staff across regional WA, and the other is to incentivise existing staff, which we have found has been really beneficial and really assisted over December and January when we were under a lot of staffing pressures across the business. There has been a lot of anecdotal feedback and commentary from existing staff about the value that they have placed in the incentive. It has certainly assisted us to stabilise our nursing workforce and to maintain the nursing skills that we need across the zone. Key evidence around that is the fact that we have been able to maintain our nursing rosters across our business during what was a really challenging time.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 304 of volume 1 of budget paper No 2. The rate of re-admissions to acute specialised mental health services within 28 days of discharge continues to remain high at 20 per cent, or one in five people. Given that the target rate is less than 12 per cent—I also asked this last year—what is being done to address this issue?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We can probably canvass this in a little more detail with the Mental Health Commission, but a range of things are in place. We have opened the 40-bed St James transition unit in the metropolitan area, which is essentially a step-down service. People can stay for as long as they need to stay while they get housing, employment and so forth. Everyone knows that housing is a challenge, particularly for discharged inpatients. If people have a stable house and a job, they are much less likely to be re-admitted or to have a significant relapse. There has also been a significant uplift in funding for the active recovery teams, which support people post-discharge, and for the community treatment teams. In fact, our increase in funding for community treatment is far bigger than the increase in funding for inpatient treatment. That is an important part of the re-calibration of those mental health services to support people in the community. Adult community treatment services received \$22 million; the active recovery team pilot received \$10.7 million; the Perth sobering-up and low-medical withdrawal services received \$7.2 million; and the infant, child and adolescent task force was funded last year to provide virtual support for at-risk children who are waiting. Of course, there was an uplift in funding for the child and adolescent mental health

service's Crisis Connect program, which also supports families and children. The WA Country Health Service emergency telehealth service helps to support regional patients and is very effective in preventing re-admissions. That is particularly challenging for regional patients, who do not have an inpatient unit, as we know, so that means that they have to travel to Perth or another region for support.

Overall, the high-level response shows that our investment in community-based treatment is 70 per cent more than our investment in inpatient treatment. That is an important re-calibration of that sector to help prevent people from being readmitted as inpatients.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 316 of volume 1 of budget paper No 2—I also referred to it earlier—and the total number of FTEs, which has increased. There is also reference on page 311. My question specifically relates to the chief executive at PathWest, Adrian Bautista. I am just wondering whether he is still employed by PathWest within WA Health.

Ms A. SANDERSON: This is not an appropriate forum in which to ask that question. I will confirm that he is no longer in the employ of WA Health, but I reiterate that that is not an appropriate question.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 308 of volume 1 of budget paper No 2. Service 6 is public and community health services. I refer to a media statement that was issued on 13 February this year titled “Funding boost for Western Australians living with epilepsy”. Can the minister confirm where in the state budget this funding would show up and is there any other funding for Epilepsy WA?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I know what the member is referring to. It is not in the budget papers. Essentially, Epilepsy WA has not been funded by government previously. It does fantastic work. I met with representatives after I became health minister and I requested that funding be provided to Epilepsy WA for the work it does. My understanding—I may be incorrect and I am happy to give the member some follow-up information on this—is that there is a pool of funding for neurological conditions and that goes to a panel and so forth. Epilepsy WA has never been successful in that. I have requested that it be accommodated in some way for future funding. I will need to get a bit more information and come back to the member on that one.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am happy to follow up. Has the internal review of community-based neurological services been completed or is it still underway?

Ms A. SANDERSON: On the first question about Epilepsy WA, it was internally funded. That is why it does not appear in this budget. I am not aware of the review.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I will follow up. This is further to a question that Hon Martin Aldridge asked. There was an internal review of the community-based services receiving funding from the state government specifically for neurological services.

Ms A. SANDERSON: That might be what the member is referring to with the epilepsy funding. Let me get some information and I will come back to the member.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, minister.

Ms L. METTAM: Before I ask this question, do we have to move specifically to the Mental Health Commission?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No; it is up to members. If the member wants to ask a question that is based on its budget, ask me the question and I will tell her whether it comes under the health budget or the Mental Health Commission's budget.

Ms L. METTAM: We have questions about the Mental Health Commission.

Ms A. SANDERSON: What I am saying is that I know it is not clear because there is crossover. If the member asks the question, I can tell her whether it comes under this budget and we can deal with it now, or we may need to deal with it during the Mental Health Commission division.

[12 noon]

Ms L. METTAM: That question is coming, but this is a health question. I refer to page 304 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. I refer to the percentage of elective surgery waitlist patients waiting over boundary. Category 1 patients have increased by six per cent. How many elective surgery cases waiting longer than clinically recommended does this equate to?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No patients are waiting outside the clinically recommended time frames, which for category 1 is 30 days. Based on the information I have, no patients are waiting outside that time frame. Sorry—that is median wait time. Overall, as an average, patients are not waiting, but there has been significant effort, and I will ask Rob Anderson to give a bit more detail on those numbers.

Significant efforts have been made across health service providers to manage the deferred care of elective surgery, and some of those are particularly the category 1 or priority cases. It varies from health service provider to health service provider and hospital to hospital, based on their specialty and the availability of staff. For example, there is a shortage of theatre nurses; they are highly sought after. We have put in place the enhanced novice theatre nurse, cardiac surgery perfusionist and anaesthetic technician recruitment and training. We are focused on medical nursing,

cardiac surgery perfusionists and anaesthetic technician workforce recruitment, both nationally and internationally. We are also increasing the utilisation of operating theatres to increase the number of patient operations. We are moving suitable patients from tertiary to more general specialist sites that have capacity; an example of the step-down to a secondary site that has capacity would be from Fiona Stanley Hospital to Fremantle Hospital.

We are looking at a range of strategies for endoscopies, which take up a significant portion of the over-boundary cases. Diverting endoscopy cases by postcode to alternative sites to balance demand across the system and converting suitable targeted procedures to same-day procedures, when it is safe to do so, free up beds. Optimising rosters, using locums and investigating staffing arrangements beyond what would normally be considered are targeted measures to avoid cancellations on the extreme or longest waitlists. We are looking at pre-rehab initiatives to support more patients to be ready for surgery to reduce cancellations. Surgery often gets cancelled because the patient is not medically fit for surgery. That happens remarkably commonly, so we help support those patients to be more ready for surgery. We are delivering additional clinics for high-demand specialties and piloting twilight sedation, which is used in the private system, for appropriate patients.

Each health service provider is conducting audits of referrals, and that has resulted in the closure and discharge of a significant number of category 3 referrals. There is ongoing, site-based auditing of category 1 referrals and over-boundary cases. There are trials of alternative models of care to improve wait times and service delivery, including the utilisation of advanced practice roles—for example, ear, nose and throat; audiology; speech pathology; and a multidisciplinary physiotherapy role for orthopaedics.

One of the sustainable health recommendations, number 11, was about outpatient reform, which will address some of the upstream pressures that we get from outpatient referrals. The \$8.2 million funded in the midyear review is for a smart referrals digital platform that helps to reduce a lot of the inefficiencies and improve our ability to focus resources on the highest priority areas.

The overall total waitlist is down from financial year to date. In April 2022, it was 29 239; this year, it is 26 819. That is down overall for all reportable procedures.

Ms L. METTAM: For clarification, I thought the minister stated that these were not over-boundary cases. I think the table illustrates an increase in over-boundary cases of six per cent. Further to that, issues regarding surgery for cardiothoracic patients have been raised with me, especially a couple of particularly tragic recent cases. What is being done? I note the minister's recent comments about the employment of an additional cardiothoracic surgeon, but I understand theatre staff are also an issue. What assurance can the minister provide that the cardiothoracic waitlist issues and challenges will be addressed?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The six per cent increase the member refers to was for non-reportable procedures. Cardiac procedures would not be in that category; they are in the reportable procedures, which have decreased. That is the first point. I will go to Paul Forden to outline some of the details, but I want to clarify the reports about some of these terrible events.

Cardiac patients, by their nature, are some of the sickest patients in the health system, and the Fiona Stanley Hospital sees the sickest of the sick. Even the private sector refers patients to Fiona Stanley Hospital because of the expertise there. It was reported that two patients were waiting. My understanding is that one of the patients was not medically fit for surgery, and they passed away from causes not related to that surgery.

The other patient was very tragic. There was a confluence of circumstances. It was a very, very rare procedure that requires two very specialised surgeons to be available at the same time. I think arrangements to go over east were offered, but quite understandably that was not taken up. We have also had high levels of COVID, which had an impact on that surgery at that time. These two cases had a lot of complexity. It is not a black-and-white case of someone dying whilst waiting for surgery. Both cases had a number of elements. Having said that, they are very high risk and vulnerable patients, and Paul Forden will outline what is being implemented by Fiona Stanley Hospital.

Mr P. Forden: Through the minister, the Fiona Stanley cardiothoracic team has increased the number of theatre cases by over 20 per cent since December. The limiting factor in doing that earlier was the availability of cardiothoracic surgeons, and that resource has now been secured. As a result of that, since December, the number of over-boundary cases has reduced by over one-third, and it continues to reduce every single week. We have appointed and agreed contracts with a new cardiothoracic surgeon from the United Kingdom, who should be arriving in August, subject to visa approvals. That will allow us to increase the number even further.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to provide the number of category 1 patients that line item refers to?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Again, that is another data question that the member needs to put on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: Will the minister not be able to provide it by supplementary information?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We can provide it if the member puts it on notice.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 12.10 to 12.15 pm

Division 22: Mental Health Commission, \$1 001 573 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Ms A. Sanderson, Minister for Mental Health.

Ms A. Cunniffe, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Operations.

Ms A. Harrison, Acting Deputy Commissioner, System Development.

Dr S. Davison, Chief Medical Officer, Mental Health.

Mr C. Patterson, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms S. Hearn, Chief of Staff, Minister for Mental Health.

Ms S. Della Bosca, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I give my apologies for the acting Mental Health Commissioner, who is unable to be here today as he has COVID.

The CHAIR: I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 323 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Paragraph 1 refers to the Ministerial Taskforce into Public Mental Health Services for Infants, Children and Adolescents aged 0–18 years in Western Australia and the proposed eight key actions and 32 recommendations to transform the public infant, child and adolescent mental health system. How many of those actions and recommendations have been fully implemented and how many remain?

Ms A. SANDERSON: As outlined, it is a staged approach. This task force was established on the recommendation of the Chief Psychiatrist, who inquired into the death of Kate Savage—they were terrible circumstances for her family—and made recommendations around the reform of the public mental health services provided to infants, children and adolescents, particularly the child and adolescent mental health service. The task force reported in March 2022 and the government committed to all 32 recommendations. It is a five to 10-year reform process, essentially to rebuild the system while trying to treat children in it. That is not without its challenges, but it outlines an important vision of reform to support families in the community through a multiagency response from schools, justice, where required, education and the health system. It will ensure that crisis intervention occurs in the community rather than in a hospital.

The government accepted all the recommendations and has started to implement that reform. As part of the 2023 budget, \$47.3 million has been provided to address some of the immediate priorities. There will be an immediate uplift in frontline services, with \$18.5 million for an uplift in FTE; \$12.9 million for peer workers, who are a very important component of the model of care; the virtual support service for at-risk children awaiting placement, which includes CAMHS Crisis Connect; and the new service for regional consumers, brief crisis intervention. The work also involved a governance framework and co-designing 12 detailed models of care. That work occurred last year, as did the implementation time frame. We cannot put in place services without the right model of care; otherwise, we would keep doing the same thing and getting the same outcome. That was a lengthy but really important part of the implementation of those reforms.

This budget has again increased the investment by another \$27.8 million over the next four years. That will include the establishment of the east metropolitan acute care response team, which was a key recommendation, and the establishment of the Bunbury hub. One of the key recommendations for reform is the hub-and-spoke model. That will be up and running pretty soon—by January 2024—as will the acute care response team. The intent is that that will also be up and running by January 2024. There is funding for an additional 10 Aboriginal mental health workers; a continued uplift to infant, child and adolescent mental health staff in the metropolitan area—that is, CAMHS staff—and the expansion of Touchstone, which is a really important service that provides intensive treatment for children aged 12 to 17 with complex personality disorders. That will provide a very important expansion to that service.

Obviously, this current phase includes the completion of 12 models of care and a service guarantee, which is a very new concept for HSPs. A service guarantee is quite a significant reform, which really puts patients and their families at the heart of the quality of the service that is provided. That is really important. All the HSPs have now agreed to that service guarantee. This phase also includes culturally safe care principles, an Aboriginal mental health worker model and a phased implementation plan and monitoring and evaluation framework. The implementation will be ongoing. As members can see from the last two budgets in particular, we are working through those implementations.

[12.20 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: In relation to the positions that have been committed to, how many FTE positions are yet to be filled, appreciating the challenge of workforce shortages?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I request that that question be put on notice. When a question is put on notice, it essentially needs to go to the Child and Adolescent Health Service and the WA Country Health Service because they both employ those positions, and officers from neither of those agencies are here now.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister referred to the hub in Bunbury, which will be operational in 2024. How many FTE are associated with that hub?

Ms A. SANDERSON: In relation to the previous question, apologies, but I do have some information in front of me. In relation to the initial expansion costing \$18.5 million, that is fully recruited to. The expansion of the Lived Experience workforce is 90 per cent recruited to, so it is fully recruited to. The crisis intervention and the brief intervention service is also fully recruited to.

Ms L. METTAM: When does the minister anticipate all the actions and recommendations to be finalised in response to the ministerial report?

Ms A. SANDERSON: There is an implementation plan. An implementation committee was set up, chaired by Sheila McHale. The deputy chair is Professor Helen Milroy, and the committee also includes representatives from the HSPs. Overall, it is a five-year reform because it is a significant reform and we have to recruit staff. We are starting now and we have already recruited to last year's commitments. There is progress every year. That is the time frame we are working towards.

Ms L. METTAM: I note that a further \$35.5 million has been committed to continue the implementation. Does the minister have an idea of the overall cost to fully implement the actions and recommendations over that five-year period?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Not at this stage. It is very difficult to predict a five-year costing plan because obviously there will be some capital requirements with the hub model and so forth. Some of the CAMHS sites need a bit of love and attention. It is very difficult to predict those costs at this stage. The biggest cost will be the workforce. That recruitment also needs to be realistic, based on market availability and the market challenges that we have at the moment. The health workplace is challenged, but the mental health workforce is significantly challenged. We have a range of incentives in place to encourage people to take up positions in mental health—in particular, nurses who may want to specialise in mental health. Peer workers in mental health is very new to Western Australia. Other states have been doing it for many years but it is quite novel in Western Australia. We are very much invested in developing that workforce as well.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 324 of budget paper No 2, and the social and emotional wellbeing model of service pilot. Can the minister advise which five regional sites were selected?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The decision on where to locate the sites was driven by the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia. They will be located in the Kimberley, the Pilbara, the goldfields, the south west and the midwest.

Ms L. METTAM: Will the service be provided by government or not-for-profit private providers?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The services will be provided by Aboriginal-controlled organisations.

[12.30 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: The government is engaging with Aboriginal not-for-profit organisations. Can I just clarify the minister's response from earlier?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Sorry; I missed that.

Ms L. METTAM: Did the minister say Aboriginal not-for-profit organisations?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The government has funded Aboriginal community-controlled organisations—ACCOs. It is up to them to determine the FTE.

Ms L. METTAM: Where is that process at?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is up and running.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 324. Paragraph 11 underneath "Community Mental Health Treatment Services" highlights the role of community mental health treatment services in reducing the number of hospitalisations. The

next paragraph states that only two services have been funded, one being telehealth for the WA Country Health Service and the other being the \$9.9 million one-year extension to the active recovery teams. Does the minister think there should be more funding for these services, given the significant role that they play in reducing hospitalisations?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The member is referencing different things. It is not the case that only two services are the entire community mental health treatment services—absolutely not. They are obviously run through our public system as well as through non-government organisations. I think the member is referring to the active recovery teams.

Ms L. METTAM: That is part of this paragraph in this section.

Ms A. SANDERSON: The active recovery teams partnership has received additional funding and, essentially, it is going through an evaluation phase, which is appropriate, to make sure that it is meeting the aims it intends to achieve and is being delivered in the way that government intended. We will obviously consider the outcomes of that evaluation before providing further funding. We are very committed to the concept, but it is appropriate that, essentially, services are evaluated at various points in time so that they can be funded appropriately.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 334, which shows that the amount for grants to community-based organisations fell from \$21 million in 2021–22 to \$228 000 in 2023–24. Can the minister explain this drop?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The drop can be explained because the 2021–22 actual grant expenditure was \$21.7 million predominantly due to the one-off payments for COVID readiness and response initiatives. These were totally COVID related. But the commission’s budget and expenditure for grants and subsidies has been very consistent over the forward estimates. It is a COVID drop-off.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister has described them as COVID payments, but will any of those initiatives be transitioned to contracted services?

Ms A. SANDERSON: This is grants to organisations that may have contracted services.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister saying that some of these services will continue? That is a significant drop-off.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Sorry; I was just getting some advice. Can the member ask that question again?

Ms L. METTAM: I am seeking some confirmation. Will those services that are not funded for 2022–23 continue in some other form? Obviously, not the COVID-19 pandemic response, but there is a whole range of funding for line items, including “Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Beds”, “Youth Mental Health and AOD Homelessness” and the “Suicide Prevention Strategy”. Will those projects be funded from somewhere else?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We are not closing down any of those services. They may not have been included in a contract. I think the member’s original question was: will they become contracted services? The answer is: yes, in some instances they will be contracted services. We are not going backwards or reducing services.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to define which services from that table will continue and which will be contracted services?

Ms A. SANDERSON: There were so many different grants for different purposes that the member would need to put that on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: Can that be provided by supplementary information?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I think it is appropriate that it goes on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 331 and the table under “Community Support”. I refer to the cessation of recurrent funding to peer support service GROW. Why has this program been defunded?

Ms A. SANDERSON: In 2019, an independent consultation and co-review included consumers, carers, stakeholders and peak body representatives to look at community-based social, recreational and prevocational group activities. Group support activities support people with mental health and alcohol and drug issues as well as psychosocial function. For the first time in many, many years—decades, in fact—these services went out to tender, rather than funding simply continuing to the same organisations. Organisations have known since 2019 that the commissioner was embarking on this process. The commission opened the open tender in 2022 based on the co-review findings. Because the market had not been tested in over a decade, feedback was sought from users of the services. The feedback of clients of the services and families was taken into consideration in the evaluation of it. It went through an independent procurement process, as is appropriate, from government with an assessment panel, based on a range of criteria.

A number of organisations were successful. An amount of \$19 million was awarded to eight services, rather than four services. They were expanded significantly into regional Western Australia and supported some priority cohorts, including young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and LGBTQIA+ people and groups. The new service providers are 55 Central in the Perth metropolitan region; Bay of Isles Community Outreach in goldfields–Esperance; Lamp in the south west region, servicing Busselton, Margaret River and Bridgetown, which I am sure the member is familiar with; Pathways SouthWest, which I know she is also familiar with; and Perth Inner City Youth Service, Rise Network and Ruah Community Services in the Perth metropolitan area and the midwest.

Essentially, they did not meet the criteria for a modern, recovery-based, co-designed mental health service. That was a significant part of the criteria. The purpose of recovery-based community services is that someone should not need the service forever. They are to support clients to move on with their lives, and work and live in the community. They should not need to keep coming back for the same service forever. That is not the recovery model. Co-design means it is designed with the people who participate in it. Those services were deemed not to be co-designed. The very strong feedback from the people in the services was that they wanted to co-design their services. They are the principles by which it occurred. There is also a separate expressions of interest process as part of the funding to support Aboriginal mental health. That meant that three Aboriginal organisations—Wungening Aboriginal Corporation, South West Aboriginal Medical Service, or SWAMS, and Wirraka Maya Health Service Aboriginal Corporation in the Pilbara—were also awarded grant agreements.

[12.40 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: The GROW program had been operating for 56 years in Western Australia, as I understand it. It received funding from every other state. Has the minister met with GROW to explain the rationale? I know that the chair was involved in shaping how it operated. I am just picking up on the minister's point about it not being co-designed.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes. I have met with the GROW board and given feedback. The Mental Health Commission has met with the CEO and the board and given feedback. We also extended its funding for a number of months to help it transition those clients into new services. I appreciate that it is very challenging. I think the fact that the service has been running in exactly the same way for 56 years might give the member an indication of where it fits in the modern delivery of mental health services. I appreciate that it might be the only thing that helps some people, but it is not the framework that the state supports. The state supports and funds recovery models and co-design services. I think its understanding of what that is differs from what it is in a modern healthcare mental health setting.

Ms L. METTAM: On the funding for Lamp Inc in Busselton, does this continue funding that had been provided? Can the minister provide a bit more information?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It runs a range of services. This is new funding for the group and peer support services.

Ms L. METTAM: Is this to provide additional services? Is it at all related to supporting those with mental health issues in attaining independent housing or is it different from that?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is new funding for Lamp. It is for the provision of group support or psychosocial support.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 325 of budget paper No 2 and hospital services. It states that mental health inpatient beds continue to be in high demand across the state. How many mental health presentations occurred in 2022–23 and how many are forecast for 2023–24?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I think the member well knows that that is a detailed data question that needs to be put on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify, can the minister provide that by supplementary information?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is a detailed data question that needs to be put on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: The government is bringing online 254 new mental health hospital beds to meet current and future demand. Can the minister give me a breakdown of where the beds will be located?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes, I can. An additional 55 beds will be at Joondalup Health Campus. The 102 beds include new mental health beds at Joondalup; it does not include the existing bed stock there, so it is an uplift of 55. There will be an additional 10 beds for Rockingham; 40 for Fremantle; nine for Armadale; 10 for Midland; 30 for Peel, depending on the time frame of the redevelopment; 14 for Bunbury, depending on the time frame of the redevelopment; 16 for Geraldton; 12 for the Bentley secure extended care unit; eight for Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital; and 53 for Graylands Hospital. The commissioning of those beds will be staggered.

Ms L. METTAM: Are these 254 new beds part of the additional 600 new beds?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Let me get advice on that and I will get back to the member before the end.

Ms L. METTAM: Are these permanent beds across the forward estimates?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes, they are.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 325 and the national agenda. How much of the \$61.5 million is for eating disorder programs?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We negotiated \$8.6 million for eating disorder services from the commonwealth government in the last round of bilaterals.

Ms L. METTAM: What programs or projects will that \$8.6 million be directed to?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It will be based in the east metropolitan area and will be in addition to the two statewide eating disorder services that exist in north and south metropolitan.

Ms L. METTAM: How many episodes of care were provided for eating disorders in 2022–23?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The member asked that question in the last estimates session. It is a detailed data question and it is not reasonable to request an answer through this process.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay. How much total funding was provided specifically to deal with eating disorders in 2023–24 and how does this compare with previous years?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is complicated to give the member a single figure. The statewide eating disorder service was provided \$31.7 million, plus the \$8.6 million from the commonwealth, plus \$4.46 million to the child and adolescent mental health service for eating disorders for people up to 16 years old. On top of that are the inpatients, which would be covered by activity-based funding. That is a flexible amount depending on demand. It is based on a formula from the commonwealth and part-funded by the state government.

[12.50 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister clarify the \$4.6 million for child and adolescent mental health service?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is for outpatients.

Ms L. METTAM: Have plans progressed for the residential eating disorder facility, and has the federal health minister written to the state minister regarding this issue?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We are in ongoing discussions about that. I want to make a few comments. I first make the point that \$4 million was an election commitment by Andrew Hastie, the member for Canning, and it was made with no consultation or discussion with the state, which runs eating disorder services in Western Australia, about the most appropriate commitment he could make. If the member for Canning had made an approach to the then state minister, I am sure the minister would have given him advice on what would provide the best outcome for Western Australians and welcomed the funding. Nevertheless, the former federal government provided \$4 million to Western Australia to build a residential eating disorder facility. At no point has the member for Canning sought to meet with me, or anyone in the state government I am aware of, to discuss this commitment. Let us put \$4 million in comparison to what other states and territories got. The Australian Capital Territory got \$13 million to build four. I managed to negotiate twice as much for eating disorders as the member for Canning did out of his own government in the last bilateral schedule, with \$8.6 million for the East Metropolitan Health Service. I managed to negotiate twice as much as the member for Canning. His is not a genuine commitment to a residential eating disorder facility. The fact that the member for Canning thought the facility could be attached to a hospital, which was his intention, shows he is completely out of touch with how we deliver in-reach and community care. A residential rehab facility should not be attached to a hospital; it is not best practice. It is not a genuine commitment. The state government is providing a significant bulk of the funding and doing the heavy lifting on eating disorders. We continue discussions with commonwealth about how that money will be best used to support that community.

Ms L. METTAM: Will a residential eating disorder facility be included?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The member for Canning did not provide the funding for a residential eating disorder facility. He barely provided the funding for the car park.

Ms L. METTAM: Other states have progressed with residential eating disorder facilities, and I know Western Australian patients have sought to attend the facility in Queensland. Is this something the government is looking at?

Ms A. SANDERSON: First of all, only one state, Queensland, has opened a facility, and the other states and territories got a lot more money, so I consider it an abject failure of the member for Canning.

Ms L. METTAM: Other states have progressed their residential eating disorder facilities. Will the minister make a decision? Are we likely to see a residential eating disorder facility here in Western Australia, or is that not on the minister's agenda?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Other states and territories were funded appropriately by the commonwealth. The Liberal member for Canning failed to get appropriate funding. I am speaking to the current commonwealth government to see how we can use that \$4 million.

Ms L. METTAM: What is the status of the eating disorder hubs?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The south metropolitan eating disorder hub is up and running, the north metropolitan eating disorder hub is up and running and the east metropolitan eating disorder hub only received funding in the last bilateral schedule, so it was only negotiated last year, and it is well underway with recruitment to open this year.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the minister think it is a bit rich to suggest that the reason a residential eating disorder facility has not progressed in WA is that there is not funding to do so?

Ms A. SANDERSON: My suggestion is entirely that the local federal member failed to secure the funding from the former government. It is a bit rich to be waving \$4 million around and not deliver for those vulnerable patients. That is what the Liberal Party and the federal member are doing here; that is, he is pretending to support vulnerable patients while refusing to engage constructively with the state. He has not once sought a meeting about this with

me, or any of my colleagues, that I am aware of. This is pure politicking on the part of the member for Canning. He well knows that \$4 million will not buy a car park. It was not a proper commitment when the ACT received \$13 million. The state government is doing the heavy lifting with eating disorders, with a \$30 million investment in adult eating disorder treatments. So it is not appropriate for the member for Canning to wave it in front of vulnerable patients without an ability to deliver, when he has abjectly failed them in the first place.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister is the Minister for Health; Mental Health in this state. She has touched on the fact that there are significant gaps in the system. Can the minister at least provide an assurance that she will look at implementing the residential eating disorder facility in the best interests of those who are challenged with this devastating condition?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We are looking at all options, of course, to support these vulnerable patients, and we continue to look at those options, and I continue to have constructive discussions with the commonwealth on how we can deliver the best possible care for people with eating disorders. At this point, the priority is community-based services because we can see more people, and that is fundamentally the issue. We can see more people through these services than a long-term residential facility that will see eight people for a very long time. Yes, there is value in these centres, and we are looking at everything, but the priority at this point is seeing as many people as we can, and we can do that through community-based supports.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 328 of budget paper No 2 and hospital bed-based services, which include Hospital in the Home services. How many Hospital in the Home beds are there at present, and where are they predominantly located?

Ms A. SANDERSON: They are in north metro, south metro and are being established in east metro. They are across the system. Exactly how many there are and where, again, that is a data question and the member would need to put it on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: I accept that the minister cannot answer, or it is consistent that she is unable to answer this question, but can she provide a rough estimate of how many Hospital in the Home beds we are talking about? Are there fewer than 100, or how many?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I cannot give the member an exact number, but we will try to get the global figure to her. It would depend on demand, so it would not be a fixed number. It is a service, and we would see as many people as it can in that service. I will try to get that number to the member.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 23: Health and Disability Services Complaints Office, \$3 952 000 —

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm

Division 29: Fire and Emergency Services, \$204 947 000 —

Ms C.M. Collins, Chair.

Ms H.M. Beazley, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr C. Waters, Acting Commissioner.

Ms M. Pexton, Deputy Commissioner.

Ms G. Camarda, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr J. Broomhall, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Operations.

Mr M. Dixon, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mr M. Carter, Executive Director.

Mr P. Leach, Executive Director.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister or parliamentary secretary may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the parliamentary secretary to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate

a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister or parliamentary secretary suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

Are there any questions? Member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, and welcome to the parliamentary secretary for her first estimates hearing, I imagine.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Thank you, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I hope it does not scar her for life.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I am sure it will!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 453, about halfway down the details of controlled grants and subsidies, and “Local Government—Community Emergency Service Managers”. How many local governments receive financial support for the employment of a community emergency service manager, or a CESM?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I thank the member. The grant scheme is provided to local governments to employ CESMs, as the member said. CESMs provide volunteer support, emergency management planning and community liaison services. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services provides partial funding for 27 CESMs employed by local government and also employs seven CESMs directly. The managers are partially funded by local government.

Acting commissioner, do you have anything to add?

Mr C. Waters: Yes; thank you, member. Supplementary to the member’s response, it is 57 local governments in total, because some local governments share CESM arrangements across multiple local governments, as well.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Just for absolute clarity, how many CESMs are employed by DFES and how many are employed by local government authorities?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will divert the question to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: I thank the member for the question. There are 34 in total; seven of the metropolitan CESMs are DFES employees and the others are employed by a combination of local governments and DFES on varying scales of financial support.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Obviously, there can be a blend of funding. Is there a consistent model? I know that three or four local governments might share one CESM. Do they each contribute as well as DFES? Is it a mixed model?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will divert the question to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: Yes. There are various models depending on their rate base. There is either a split of 70–30, 60–40 or 50–50. Our DFES-employed CESMs are funded on a 50–50 basis in conjunction with local governments. In addition, if there are multiple local governments sharing a CESM, it is basically worked out on their individual rate base. It is a percentage of the overall percentage they actually contribute to the program.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What funding has been allocated to increase the number of CESMs available to local governments in 2023–24 and across the forward estimates?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The total amount in the budget for our CESMs for 2023–24 is \$2.713 million.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there any other source of funding outside the department? Are there no other sources; it is either DFES or the local government and there are no other grants and no ability to fund them from another source?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I do not believe so, but I will divert to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: No; the funding is either from DFES funding or from the individual local governments.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many local governments have applied for funding to support a CESM and been denied?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I do not have that information in front of me. Acting commissioner?

Mr C. Waters: There have been some that have been denied. I could not give the member a definite number, but I would estimate probably around half a dozen.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Would the parliamentary secretary be able to let us know by way of supplementary information which local governments have been denied that funding?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thank the member; I appreciate that.

The CHAIR: Parliamentary secretary, can you please clarify what you will be giving as supplementary information?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Sure; we will be giving information on which local governments have been denied funding for local government community emergency service managers.

[*Supplementary Information No B9.*]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the government doing to address concerns about inequities between CESM employment terms and conditions?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Sorry, can I get the member to expand? What does he mean by inequities between CESMs?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My understanding is that there are different terms and conditions depending on whether someone is in the regions or the metropolitan area et cetera, so what attempts are being made to bring equity to those areas?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will divert the question to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: Thank you. We have just introduced a new memorandum of understanding for all the CESMs. When a CESM who is currently on an old contract comes up for a new contract, they will be brought in to the new MOU arrangements, which will standardise their conditions and salaries.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I appreciate that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Welcome along, everybody, and to the parliamentary secretary. I refer to page 446 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, the list of spending changes, heading “Other” and line item “Aviation Services—Cost Increase”. Can the parliamentary secretary give me some indication of the reason for that expenditure and what is driving that increase?

[2.10 pm]

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Sorry, member—the reason for what?

Mr R.S. LOVE: The increased spending in that period.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: An amount of \$7.18 million was approved for 2022–23 to 2026–27 to cover price increases for aviation contracts, including the emergency rescue helicopter service, critical care paramedics and air operations high-threat period fleet. Does the acting commissioner have anything to add?

Mr C. Waters: I just add that they are predominantly consumer price index increases.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The parliamentary secretary mentioned the emergency helicopters. Is there a plan for an emergency helicopter to be based in Geraldton?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The aerial fleet was strategically located at bases in Jandakot, Serpentine, Bunbury, Busselton, Manjimup and Albany to service the needs of metropolitan and regional communities. The fleet also had access to 39 regional bases and various helicopter landing sites. Does the acting commissioner have anything to add?

Mr C. Waters: The question probably needs to be posed to the Department of Health. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services manages the contracts for the aircraft, the pilots and crew and also the critical care paramedics. In relation to what the aeromedical services look like, that is a decision for the Department of Health to progress.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a further question about the stations where the water bombers were based during that period. The parliamentary secretary mentioned a number of places where they might be stationed. Where were they stationed during the fire season?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will divert the question to the acting commissioner, who may also like to delegate.

Mr C. Waters: I will delegate to Jon Broomhall.

Mr J. Broomhall: Every day during the recent bushfire season, Western Australia’s aerial firefighting fleet of 36 aircraft was on stand-by. There was a mix of aerial fire suppression from light helicopters to large air tankers, and they were deployed across the state. It is the largest single fire jurisdiction in the world at 2.6 million square kilometres. The aerial fleet was strategically located at bases in Jandakot, Serpentine, Bunbury, Busselton, Manjimup and Albany to service the needs of metropolitan and regional communities. The fleet also had access to 39 regional bases and various helicopter landing sites. Jointly funded by the state and federal governments, the fleet could be mobilised within 15 minutes. Additionally, two Black Hawk helicopters added increased flexibility to the fleet with their ability to drop large volumes of water and foam in areas often inaccessible to firefighting units on the ground. Each helicopter is fitted with an Australian–designed and built belly tank that can hold up to 4 500 litres and can remain operational for up to 10 hours, supported by mobile fuel tankers on the ground.

To provide DFES with an enhanced strategic aerial intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability and also to help manage large complex bushfires and other natural disasters, including flooding, the state government provided additional funds of \$8.3 million for a new high-performance aircraft and multispectral line scanner to map a fire in minutes. The line scanner can also determine a range of temperatures within the fire and help firefighters map where the fire is travelling and how to best deploy the resources.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 445 of budget paper No 2 and the total appropriations provided to deliver services. I refer to the budgeted \$104 495 000 for 2023–24. Why is this significantly more than in both the previous budget years and the forward estimates?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The net amount appropriated to deliver services predominantly funds the following ongoing programs in the budget: DFES recovery functions, including the disaster recovery funding arrangements for WA and

the costs of the Office of Emergency Management that were transferred to DFES under the machinery-of-government amalgamation in 2018; the annual contribution to Surf Life Saving WA on behalf of the state; the contribution towards the costs of operating the metropolitan emergency rescue helicopter service; Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Card contributions; and the holding account for the depreciation of assets. If there are other associated amounts, I will divert to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: I defer to our chief financial officer, Georgina.

Ms G. Camarda: We have received significantly more consolidated account appropriations this year. One of the main reasons is that we have an additional \$30 million consolidated account subsidy because the emergency services levy increase was a maximum of only five per cent for the average residential charge for category 1. We have had a \$30 million consolidated account injection, but a number of items that were approved as part of the budget process were also funded from the consolidated account. Some of those items included \$6.8 million in funding for the ex-tropical cyclone Ellie task force and \$6.2 million in funding to create a more sustainable disaster recovery capability. We have also had some additional grants of \$9.2 million. There are some more grant moneys for the recovery efforts in relation to cyclone Seroja. The best place to see it clearly in the budget papers is in the spending changes table. There are a couple of big items in the 2023–24 budget year. I mentioned the \$6.8 million for the task force; that is in the spending changes table. There is also \$9.2 million for the tropical cyclone Seroja community benefit fund and resilience grant program, and \$6.3 million for state disaster recovery capability. The majority of those items in the spending changes table were funded from the consolidated account.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you for that comprehensive explanation.

I refer to page 446 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2 and the line item “Mitigation Activity Fund”, and also to page 453, which details the bushfire mitigation activity fund through the emergency services levy and royalties for regions. It is basically a combination of both pages. First, can the parliamentary secretary provide detail on each of these programs and how they are distinct?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: In terms of the mitigation activity fund referred to on page 446, an expense limit of \$839 000 was approved in 2022–23 to reflect an increase of \$800 000 in the contribution by the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage and \$39 000 in repayments of unspent grants. The DPLH administers the royalties for regions mitigation activity fund for mitigation of extreme bushfire and other risks on state-owned land within and immediately adjacent to regional town sites. The royalties for regions funding is allocated between the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and DFES. The 2023–24 budget submission approved an increase in revenue of \$839 000 to recognise that \$800 000 higher than projected DPLH contribution, as I mentioned. There is an additional expense limit of \$839 000 in 2022–23 to contribute towards the 2022–23 mitigation activity fund grant rounds 1 and 2. An increase of \$839 000 in the spending changes table, as Ms Camarda mentioned, reflects the expenditure component of the budget submission. Does the acting commissioner have anything to add?

[2.20 pm]

Mr C. Waters: I will refer that to Murray Carter, executive director.

Mr M. Carter: Further to the member’s broad overview, the royalties for regions money that was referred to, which comes across to Department of Fire and Emergency Services, is directly transferred on to local government through the mitigation activity fund. That forms a portion of that fund as well as a proportion of the emergency services levy money attributed to the mitigation activity fund. It is a really important fund; it has done a huge amount of good for a number of local governments and the crown land for which local governments are responsible. Since 2017, we have put over \$42.7 million directly into local government from a combination of those two to address high-risk mitigation on the ground. It is all for on-the-ground activities within those local governments. We are really pleased to say that, as of the last returns we did, 93 local governments are participating in that program and 73 of them have an endorsed, approved bushfire risk management plan, which opens up access to the mitigation activity fund. That is a key plank of our mitigation efforts on the ground.

It is a combination of the royalties for regions funding and the ESL funding. We administer them. Obviously, some areas are eligible for both or for only one, depending on the funding source, and we try to take out some of the administrative overhead for local governments and manage them under the same set of criteria to make it as seamless as we possibly can to get some efficiency in the program. It is a really important program for us. Four or five years into that program, I have no doubt that it has made a significant difference in lessening the risk from bushfire for the Western Australian community.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is fairly challenging to follow in some ways. The first question is: the mitigation activity fund has obviously ended, as shown on page 446, and it has been blended across, if you like, into the ESL arrangements in the line item on page 453.

Mr M. Carter: The royalties for regions component was a three-year funding, and the coming year is the third and final year of that fund. Recently, the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage briefed the State Bushfire Advisory Council, which is a ministerial advisory council, about its plans to conduct an independent review of the

cost–benefit of that fund with a view to ask government to further extend that fund. Royalties for regions has been an important component for a number of years, and the ESL remains unchanged and is budgeted through the out years, so that will remain. The difference and why one comes to an end is because the three-year agreement, through the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, for royalties for regions concludes in one more year.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Would the parliamentary secretary’s summary be that mitigation activities for this program have actually increased or are they decreasing over the forward estimates period?

Mr M. Carter: The amount of activity has certainly increased. That funding has supported planning on its way to getting the approved plans, so on-ground implementation has increased. There is no doubt about that. I think the fact that 73 local governments are now doing on-the-ground work is testament to that, and we are starting to see the benefit of that realised on the ground. The planning support component has eased off a little bit in some ways, but the balance of the funding has then been moved into more on-ground works through the mitigation activity fund. I think that is a good news story for the community of Western Australia.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the quantum of bushfire mitigation works undertaken by DFES or other government agencies in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 to date? I know that is a fairly comprehensive question. Would it be able to be supplied by supplementary information?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes, it can be supplied by supplementary information.

The CHAIR: Can you please clarify what you would like to supply as supplementary information?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Can the member please repeat his query?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the quantum of bushfire mitigation works undertaken by DFES or other government agencies in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 to date?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I concur with that except for the other agencies. We can only supply information related to DFES.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, parliamentary secretary.

[Supplementary Information No B10.]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 446 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. There is a line item in the ongoing initiatives section, just above “Other”, for tropical cyclone Seroja; it has \$25 million of underspend expected in this current year, which is yet to conclude, and \$100 000 of underspend next year. I also refer to page 124 of budget paper No 3 and the table “Major spending changes since the 2022–23 mid-year review”, which shows that in 2022–23 a total of \$64.9 million of underspend was expected at that point and another \$5 million underspend is expected this year. The total underspend on that line item is \$69.9 million. I would like to know exactly what total quantum of funds from the disaster funding recovery arrangements remain available for grant applications to access. I have a number of follow-on questions.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes, the member is correct. There is a decrease of \$25.1 million in 2022–23 and \$100 000 in 2023–24 to reflect the reduced forecast spend against the recovery and resilience grants, and the monitoring and evaluation programs. This was largely attributable to individuals and small businesses holding greater than expected levels of insurance and other self-reliant activities. DFES administers the disaster recovery funding arrangements for WA. The significant damage caused by cyclone Seroja resulted in the commonwealth and state governments jointly announcing a \$122 million package. The funding was made available from categories C and D of the DRFAWA. The amount of total spend is reflected in the budget documents, but I will refer that to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: I will refer that to Deputy Commissioner Pexton, who looked after recovery.

Ms M. Pexton: The item in our DFES budget papers is a reflection of the grants that DFES has actually delivered. The difference, then, in budget paper No 3 is our role as the administrator of the DRFAWA and the overarching total packages that were established for tropical cyclone Seroja. If I have the member’s question correctly, and I hope he will correct me if I am wrong, the difference is that we are talking about the forecast relating to the resilience and recovery grants in our budget papers, as opposed to budget paper No 3, which is the overarching, entire packages that were developed for tropical cyclone Seroja.

Mr R.S. LOVE: My question was actually: what is the total quantum that remains available for grant applicants to receive or access?

Ms M. Pexton: We might need to take that one on notice, if we can. I just want to make sure. We extended the dates for all the grants programs, as the member may be aware, due to some of the challenges with the workforce being able to deliver them. The DRFAWA is a reimbursement grant; therefore, all the grants have been extended for an additional 12 months. I do not have that re-forecasted figure with me here to answer the member’s question about that grant, so I would need to take that one on notice.

[2.30 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: Will that be provided by way of supplementary information?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Does the member mean supplementary information regarding how much grant funding is still available for acquittal?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes.

[Supplementary Information No B11.]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I asked what funding is still available. Can the parliamentary secretary give me a forecast of what she expects will be handed back as part of that discussion? Sorry, I should have been more specific.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: That is not covered in the budget; therefore, I cannot answer.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Fair enough. Could the parliamentary secretary explain whether there will be any review of the grants program to see why it was under-utilised? I know it is easy to say, “Oh, it’s covered by insurance”, but I know that a lot of people are not fully covered by insurance, simply because they are in a position in which they cannot meet the conditions of the grant. Can the parliamentary secretary inform me whether the government intends to undertake a review of the recovery program and the appropriateness of the grants and the criteria, and to have a discussion with the federal government about that? Tropical cyclone Seroja was in an area of the state where many people do have insurance. The parliamentary secretary has identified that there is an underspend, but I suspect that it is not all due to the fact that there was insurance. A lot of people are unable to rebuild. I think there needs to be a very comprehensive undertaking to get to the bottom of what went wrong and why some people are not covered.

The CHAIR: Could the member please clarify with a short sharp question at the end?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I did have it and then I went into more detail. Will DFES review the appropriateness of the grant structure and the reasons why it was underspent? It is very easy to say, “They’re insured.”

The CHAIR: Remind me what line item you are referring to.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am talking about the underspend of \$25 million on page 446 of budget paper number 2, volume 2, under “STC Seroja”, and the underspend of \$64.9 million in budget paper No 3.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: We are continually reviewing grants programs and activities, and learnings happen out of every natural disaster or incident. A national review of the DFRA is underway.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Will there be a review into the appropriateness of the grant structures for tropical cyclone Seroja?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes.

Ms C.M. TONKIN: I refer to page 445 and the line item “Ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie”. Can the parliamentary secretary detail how \$38.3 million will be used by the department to help communities in the Kimberley region recover from tropical cyclone Ellie and the floods?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I thank the member for that question. Western Australia’s ability to respond to and recover from natural disasters will be strengthened, with \$38.3 million set aside in this state budget to fund WA’s biggest ever dedicated recovery team. The funding recognises the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters in WA, with flooding in the Kimberley, severe tropical cyclone Seroja in the midwest and major bushfires in the Perth Hills and regional WA in the past two years alone. A \$24.9 million investment will enhance the Department of Fire and Emergency Services’ ability to provide support following a natural disaster. There will be 29 permanent full-time positions created to establish a sustainable state recovery capability. Another \$13.4 million has been committed to fund a task force to manage and support recovery in the Kimberley in the wake of flooding caused by ex-tropical cyclone Ellie. This funding will employ 20 full-time staff for two years, while a further 12 full-time staff will be employed for 12 months. The significant increase in resources from the McGowan government will provide the biggest dedicated recovery team Western Australia has ever had. It will enable DFES to meet the increased demand for state recovery by having more people on the ground, which will help communities recover and rebuild faster. The state government is committed to making sure that communities are flexible and resilient, making it easier for them to bounce back and recover from these devastating weather events.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In regard to ex-tropical cyclone Ellie, the parliamentary secretary just read out some of the response. Will the state government also commit to undertaking a full review of the Kimberley floods and the response to it?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Again, member, that is not in the budget papers. I cannot answer that.

The CHAIR: That does not relate to expenditure.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is not in the budget paper. I would have thought that it would be in the ordinary activities of DFES.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes, but we are in budget estimates.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Are the ordinary activities of DFES not funded by the budget?

The CHAIR: Member, if it is not relating to a specific line item —

Mr R.S. LOVE: We will let that go for now.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a question about the status of the Fitzroy River Bridge. Is the parliamentary secretary aware how long the temporary Fitzroy River Bridge is likely to remain in operation?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Minister Saffioti answered questions regarding the infrastructure work on the bridge yesterday. The bridge is under Main Roads and is not covered by our budget papers. It is a Main Roads' remit.

The CHAIR: Can I please remind members that we are looking at the division regarding the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My understanding was that DFES personnel were originally involved with the Fitzroy River Bridge. Are any DFES personnel involved with the establishment of the new bridge or is it all under the Department of Transport?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: No DFES personnel are currently involved with the bridge.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 450 of budget paper 2, volume 2, and the line item “Primary Fire and Emergency Fleet” under “Vehicle Programs”—the second and third last lines. Noting that DFES has been struggling to deliver replacement fleet vehicles in recent years, how many vehicles remain in service beyond their indicative service life?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: As a result of the recent changes to the vehicle model with more advanced technological modifications, one of the new urban fire trucks experienced an issue that caused the pump within the truck to default. DFES worked with the manufacturer to identify the cause of this issue. The other new fire trucks were taken offline as a precaution. I am pleased to say that the cause of the fault has been rectified and the fire trucks are now back in service. In the metropolitan area we have 139 vehicles across DFES career and volunteer brigades, and a further 130 across local government bushfire brigades. Was the member asking how many appliances were online or offline?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I was asking how many vehicles remain in service beyond their indicative service life.

[2.40 pm]

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I defer to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: I will defer to Mr Leach for those numbers.

Mr P. Leach: We do not have the exact numbers here. However, a point to note is that none of the vehicles that we keep in the fleet is beyond its operational service life. They are maintained regularly. They are maintained to a standard that is operationally effective. At such time as they become non-effective, they are removed. However, at this point—this goes back to the original question—all the vehicles we currently have are serviceable and operational as part of the fleet.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many of those vehicles are scheduled to be replaced in 2023–24?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I do not believe that level of detail is covered in the budget papers.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As far as I am concerned, it is part of the primary fire and emergency fleet, the budget line item I have just spoken about.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Is the member asking how many appliances would be due to end their operational life in 2023–24?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I appreciate the explanation. I asked how many remained in service beyond their indicative service life.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: So that is none.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Are any of those vehicles scheduled to be replaced in 2023–24?

Mr P. Leach: Again, that is not something that is readily available given that these vehicles are assessed as they come through for servicing. It is not a number that we have predetermined. It is difficult to say that, for example, we will retire 10 vehicles this financial year. It really depends on the nature of the vehicle and the nature of the assessment that is done at the workshops. It is not a planned schedule; it is done on a case-by-case basis. The rationale for that is that we have a significant number of vehicles across the fleet and across the state. In terms of chronological age, which some people use, some of them still may have quite low kilometrage on them. It really depends on the condition of the vehicle at the time and the purpose for which that vehicle was intended, because obviously we also have a large diversity of vehicles. That also factors into whether a vehicle will remain operational. That is something that is very difficult to predict in advance.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: When a brigade receives a new appliance, what are the protocols around that? Is it the case that the minister or the Department of Fire and Emergency Services advises brigades, including volunteer brigades, not to publicise or photograph vehicles after they have been received until they are officially presented by the minister or a government representative?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Member, that does not relate to any budget line item for spend.

The CHAIR: Members, please keep your questions relating to expenditure.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I think it refers to the primary fire and emergency fleet when there is a new appliance.

The CHAIR: Member, it is not about the expenditure. This is specifically budget estimates around spend.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is in relation to the expenditure for a new vehicle and its release, or the way the vehicle is presented once it has had its initial opening, if you like.

The CHAIR: Parliamentary secretary, would you like to respond to that question or defer to the department?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: It is just not a question about expenditure. Once an appliance is delivered, it is operational.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will rephrase it: is it true that the minister's office or DFES is asking volunteers to travel sometimes up to hundreds of kilometres to transport new appliances for the purpose of attending media or promotional events, which takes volunteers and resources out of their fire district?

The CHAIR: Member, that also does not relate to expenditure.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is related to my concern about taking volunteers outside their district for a promotional appearance for the minister.

The CHAIR: I will ask a final time whether the parliamentary secretary would like to respond to that question, and if not, we will move on to a different question.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: No.

Ms C.M. TONKIN: I refer to page 450 and vehicle programs. How does DFES plan to ensure that its emergency services fleet of vehicles meets the demands of emergency services in WA?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: More than \$32 million was spent in the first 10 months of 2022–23, delivering 91 new emergency services vehicles across Western Australia and bolstering the state's firefighting capability. This includes two brand new vehicles—the road crash rescue tender, designed to be the primary road crash response vehicle in rural and coastal locations; and the general rescue utility, a land search and rescue vehicle used primarily by the State Emergency Service. The new vehicles are part of the McGowan government's \$125 million investment in local emergency services manufacturing, which includes new manufacturing works in Canning Vale, Kewdale, Malaga, Osborne Park and Collie. The DFES operational fleet consists of over 1 600 vehicles that are capable of responding to a range of hazards including bushfires, structure fires, cyclones, rescues, storms, floods and HAZMAT incidents.

The full list of delivered appliances, as at 30 April 2023, is: light tanker, four career fire and rescue service projects; 16 volunteer fire and rescue service projects; 12 volunteer fire and emergency services projects; and 20 local government grant scheme projects. For urban, there was a total of 17; urban pump, a total of four; broadacre, a total of 13; general rescue utility, four across VFES and SES; and road crash rescue tender, one in the SES; and one pod carrier in the CFRS. The total number of appliances is 91.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 450, asset investment program, and the \$22.4 million for ongoing vehicle replacement programs in paragraph 1.1.2. When the fire units are replaced, are they stripped down and then sold through the normal auction process? How are those vehicles relinquished?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will defer to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: My understanding is that they are decommissioned and then go through the auction process.

Ms M. BEARD: Has consideration been given to regional people who are very remote being able to purchase those units for their volunteer groups or for farms and pastoral properties to get more units into the region? Is there provision for that?

Mr C. Waters: Yes, we are currently looking at a program to enable farmer response capability to have the first opportunity to purchase those through auction.

Ms M. BEARD: Thank you; it is a regular question I am asked.

Mr C. Waters: Yes, we are just going through the process to look at the governance requirements and what we can and cannot do.

[2.50 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the line item "Australian Fire Danger Rating System" on page 445 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. What is the purpose of this ongoing funding?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will give the member a bit of background to the Australian Fire Danger Rating System signage replacement. On 1 September 2022, WA successfully transitioned to the Australian Fire Danger Rating System—a new and simplified nationally consistent system. In 2022, DFES allocated \$500 000 of commonwealth grant funding to support local governments with the replacement of fire danger rating signage. This funding allowed for the replacement and retrofitting of existing signage and associated freight costs, with DFES coordinating the central signage procurement for the 70 local governments across Western Australia. Local governments are responsible for installation.

The fire danger rating roadside signage usually displayed along major transport routes is only one method of communicating the fire dangers and risks to the community for their preparedness and action. DFES led a formal procurement process facilitated by the WA Department of Finance in mid-2022. Successful respondents were deemed to represent value for money and have sufficient capacity to supply required signs with condensed time frames. All tender respondents were evaluated against the criteria as per the publicly available tender request, and contracts were awarded to six vendors. Local governments and other organisations and departments can use the tender to procure signage for the next two years. By mid-December 2022, all 150 analogue signs had been produced and dispatched to 46 local governments by two WA suppliers. One other outer-metropolitan government undertook to retrofit its existing 16 analogue signage, which was completed by the start of February 2023.

Anecdotal information received from many local governments is that analogue signage installation is progressing, with 50 per cent complete. However, DFES has minimal influence on when signs will be installed following signage delivery. DFES was advised mid-January 2023 that digital signage previously committed to be completed by the end of 2022 had been significantly delayed due to difficulties sourcing electronic components and manufacturing delays.

As I said, approximately 50 per cent of local governments that received replacement signage have installed it. This is a new fire danger rating service. That is where that money is going. A total of \$1.95 million was approved in 2022–23 in relation to that commonwealth grant to deliver community awareness signage and support local governments to replace the fire danger rating signage throughout the state, as I mentioned. An additional \$1.957 million was approved over 2023–24 to 2023–27 on ongoing system maintenance, including user support, live data analysis and governance arrangements and reporting.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the state government undertaking any review of the implementation of the AFDRS following the previous high-threat period in the southern part of the state?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Sorry, member, are we reviewing what?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will the government undertake a review of the implementation of the AFDRS following the first summer the system has been in place?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The answer is yes. I will defer to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: Yes, we are doing our own review in conjunction with the national review. The national review will occur because it is a new national system. We will have input into that with our own data and the findings we found from our internal review.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has DFES received any feedback from government agencies, members of Parliament or local governments regarding the implementation of the AFDRS since September 2022?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: How does this relate to expenditure?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It relates to the implementation of the new system. I think it is important to know whether there has been any feedback.

The CHAIR: Does your question relate to feedback on the expense of this program?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am referring to feedback on expenditure and also on the implementation of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Is the member making sure that we are conducting a review of how the money was expended after the season?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: With a totally new system in place, I assume that the government would be getting feedback from local governments and any variety of sources on whether the system can be improved and whether it operated properly over the last summer, considering it was the first summer and a new set-up. It is a general question but I think it is important given that it is a totally new system. I think many of our farmers and people in the ag regions were trying to adjust to it, as well as local governments.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: It is not related to expenditure but I am happy for it to be answered by the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: We have received some correspondence from local governments and other parties on the new system. There have been some anomalies. Obviously, we would expect that with a new system being introduced. The system changed from six ratings back to four, which are colour coded and give simple messaging, and there was also an increase in the number of districts that it was attributed to, rising from 37 to 48. Also, the biggest factor was

increasing the different fuel types from two, being forest to grassland, to now incorporate eight different fuel types. Some anomalies have been created in using the new system. That feedback will be taken as part of the review and then used in conjunction with the national review to work on how the system can be improved going forward.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I appreciate that response.

Has there been an increase in harvest vehicle movement bans since the implementation of the new AFDRS?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will defer to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: I understand that harvest and vehicle movement bans are imposed by local government. We do not keep those figures. I will defer to Murray Carter as he may have some additional information.

Mr M. Carter: Thank you, chair, and I apologise for jumping the gun a bit earlier with my previous response.

The acting commissioner is correct; we do not keep those numbers. It is a matter for local government. I spoke to a lot of local governments as we came out of that early escalating phase, particularly through the harvest period specifically, which this relates to. It was probably a milder summer so it is difficult to compare year to year. Not only are they different systems, but no season is the same. We actually had a reduction in total fire bans—the total number triggered by the AFDRS system. I can tell members that because we get that number. We expect the flow-on effect, triggered by the fire behaviour index, as with harvest and vehicle movement bans, would be the same.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I agree that it was a cooler summer. I do not think we had a day over 40, which was probably good in the world of harvest bans, farming and harvesting.

What detail can the parliamentary secretary provide on the national review into the AFDRS and will DFES prepare a submission to the review?

[3.00 pm]

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Thank you, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This is my last question on this.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: It is very unrelated to budget expenditure.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I know it is, but it is important. Given it is the first year of the system, will the Department of Fire and Emergency Services be putting in a submission to the national review?

The CHAIR: Parliamentary secretary, would you like to respond to that question?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will, but I will defer to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: Yes, we will. Obviously, we are doing our own internal review of our findings and the anomalies that were attributed to Western Australia, specifically, and then that will feed into the national review.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you very much. I want to ask a few more questions on “Ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie (ex-TC Ellie)” on page 445. The first one is: what quantum of funding and assistance has been provided by the state government in response to the Kimberley floods to date? The parliamentary secretary gave out a list a little while ago, but could the parliamentary secretary confine it to the new amounts outside the budget that, I think, she mentioned.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I know that the member is on page 445, but so I can access my notes, what line item is the member referring to?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The line item is “Ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie (ex-TC Ellie)” and the clean-up program, et cetera, on page 445.

The CHAIR: Under “Spending Changes”.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: An amount of \$1.5 million was approved in 2022–23 and 2023–24 for the immediate clean-up and debris removal from residences and local communities and the disposal of debris to landfill and management of hazardous waste. A total of \$30 million in funding was approved. The state contribution to that was \$15 million to assist with the clean-up, wash out and removal of debris from public spaces, residences and businesses. It includes the pump-out of septic tanks and waste management and a contingency provision for additional landfill or containerisation of waste for removal to Derby. It is to be managed by the Shire of Derby–West Kimberley. The total cost of the assistance package from category C of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Western Australia and the distribution of the costs from responsible agencies in 2023–24 is: DFES, \$500 000; Shire of Derby–West Kimberley, \$17.5 million; and Shire of Halls Creek, \$1 million.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many people remain displaced from their communities and in temporary accommodation?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I do not have those details because it is not related to budget expenditure. Does the acting commissioner have those details?

Mr C. Waters: Ms Pexton does.

Ms M. Pexton: We have no further displaced people in emergency accommodation. We have a range of people clearly in temporary accommodation while their properties are being refurbished or repaired.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the weekly cost associated with temporarily accommodating those displaced persons?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: That is the responsibility of the Department of Communities, not DFES.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the expected time frame for the delivery of the Rio Tinto workers camp to Fitzroy Crossing, which I believe DFES has some involvement with?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Can the member please find me a line item so I can refer to my notes? Also, in order to prepare her, I note that I will defer this to Deputy Commissioner Pexton.

The CHAIR: Member, can you refer to the specific line item?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, I refer to “Ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie (ex-TC Ellie): Clean-up Program—Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFAWA)” on page 445.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes, I will defer that to Deputy Commissioner Pexton.

Ms M. Pexton: Can the member just restate whether he was after the date?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the expected time frame for the delivery of the Rio Tinto workers camp to Fitzroy Crossing?

Ms M. Pexton: DFES’s involvement has been to transfer that asset from Rio Tinto to the state government. Pre-mobilisation works to the camp have already been completed. Works have commenced at the site, which is to be located at the back of the sports oval in Fitzroy Crossing in the Shire of Derby–West Kimberley. Mobilisation of the camp will commence on 13 June and handover and commencement of operations is expected by the end of June.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you very much. What grants programs or other funding assistance is available to those impacted by the floods?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Thank you, member. There is a range of grants and I will refer to Deputy Commissioner Pexton.

Ms M. Pexton: Thank you. The parliamentary secretary has outlined all those in her previous comment and response to this question. The majority of the funding that has been allocated so far, as the member can see from the budget papers, has been around some subsidies and supports. They are not necessarily individual grant line items and they have been outlined previously.

Ms L. DALTON: I refer to page 445 and the line item “State Disaster Recover Capability”. I ask the parliamentary secretary: how do initiatives underpin its response to cyclone events such as that experienced in the Pilbara by ex–severe tropical cyclone Ilsa?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The eye of ex–severe tropical cyclone Ilsa crossed the coast near Pardoo about midnight on Thursday, 13 April 2023, as a category 5 system—the first category 5 system to make landfall in WA since 2009. Ex–STC Ilsa brought very destructive winds, as well as heavy rainfall between De Grey River and Pardoo Roadhouse. Before it crossed the coast, ex–STC Ilsa set an Australian record for the highest 10-minute sustained wind speed of 218 kilometres an hour at Bedout Island off the east Pilbara coast. Thankfully, populated areas such as Port Hedland and Bidyadanga, escaped the brunt of the cyclone, with wind speeds at Port Hedland peaking at 70 kilometres an hour.

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services closely monitored this system for more than a week before it crossed the coast, and emergency services were well prepared. Accurate forecast track mapping from the Bureau of Meteorology was incredibly helpful in helping us plan our emergency response. The outstanding work of all the volunteers and career personnel who answered the call to action played a pivotal role in ensuring people were well prepared. DFES significantly boosted its resources in the north west to keep the community safe. This included additional personnel, aircraft and equipment.

DFES worked around the clock to keep communities prepared and informed, as the cyclone approached the Pilbara and Kimberley coast. DFES was in regular contact with people inland of the expected coastal crossing, including Aboriginal communities, mine sites, pastoral stations and tourism operations. Aboriginal communities were contacted to ensure they had enough supplies and to find out whether any medically vulnerable or elderly people needed to be relocated. DFES staff were in touch with 17 pastoral and other communities in the Pilbara region to assess their preparedness or whether any assistance was required. Staff also contacted 12 mine sites in the region.

DFES worked with people staying north and south of Eighty Mile Beach to ensure caravanners and campers left the area when a yellow alert was declared. There were additional aircraft on standby in Karratha and one of those helicopters was retrofitted with equipment to undertake medical evacuations if required.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 445 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the budget allocated towards “Bushfire Framework Review”; the forward estimates have no future funding. Why was the bushfire framework review pushed to 2023–24?

[3.10 pm]

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: In 2023–24, \$478 000 was approved. It was funded by consolidated appropriation to extend three fixed-term FTE to continue with the implementation of the bushfire framework review. This included the delivery of the new mapping methodology for bushfire-prone areas in collaboration with CSIRO. The bushfire framework review is a priority of government. It aims to mature land-use planning arrangements for bushfires in Western Australia and reduce red tape for residential and tourism development. Resourcing for the review has been shared across agencies. The resourcing ensures DFES has the capacity to enable timely revisions of the map of bushfire-prone areas and associated system and policy changes that underpin the bushfire framework review as well as mitigate the risks associated with various activities. I will refer further information to be provided by Mr Carter, executive director.

Mr M. Carter: Adding to the parliamentary secretary's comments, members may be aware that the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage is responsible for the *State planning policy 3.7: Planning in bushfire prone areas*. That is out for public consultation now. The temporary staff across agencies, as referred to by the parliamentary secretary, are to deal with the outcomes of that review. There has been a lot of work over the previous two years to get to the point of a new draft policy for public consultation. The map of bushfire-prone areas, which is of course ours as it is the remit of the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner, is a critical part of providing the trigger in Western Australia that invokes the requirements for compliance with *State planning policy 3.7*. The three temporary resources, which are for only one further budget year, are to see out the combination of those two projects across three different business areas within DFES, effectively to get us a more nuanced and accurate map of bushfire-prone areas. It is also with the intent that the *State planning policy 3.7* can react to it in a way that is more efficient in handling development in bushfire-prone areas so that high-hazard areas, which need significant amendment, conditions and consideration, are well dealt with. For other areas that are less so, there is not the overhead and the red tape around some of them. The policy example of that is around significant built-up urban areas. It is out for consultation at the moment, subject to the final policy being endorsed by government. We are talking about within the metro area and regional centres such as Albany and Geraldton where we have remnant vegetation within broader town sites. They are obviously not the same bushfire risk as Mundaring in Perth hills, for argument's sake. It is a different policy approach. It is not to say they are not at risk from bushfire but the scale of risk and the way it should be mitigated and managed is very different. We would like to treat that with the respect it deserves with a more nuanced policy approach to development of proposals across those areas.

Ms L. METTAM: Will the bushfire framework review also inform prescribed burning for DBCA, or is it just about highlighting and referring to bushfire response?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will refer to Mr Carter.

Mr M. Carter: The short answer is no. It refers purely to development in bushfire-prone areas. It is not about the broader mitigation effort or response. All planned burning is a key plank of mitigation across the agencies. It is really about the development of planning approvals and subdivisions—anything that requires building applications—and how they are dealt with. Generally, the decision-maker in those is local government or the WA Planning Commission, depending on the scale and type. That policy space deals purely with those not the other aspects of bushfire management.

Ms L. METTAM: What power does DFES have with what we are talking about here for fire risk? Is there the power to veto developments such as the North Stoneville development in relation to fire risk?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: This question is much more policy related than expenditure related, but I will ask Mr Carter if he is happy to answer the question.

Mr M. Carter: Thanks. I am happy to answer the question. The short answer is no, we do not have the power of veto, to use the member's words. DFES's role in that planning and development space is purely as a referral agency. Within the trigger mechanisms in that framework, there are certain types of development that have mandatory referral from the decision-maker, again be it the Western Australian Planning Commission or local government, which must be referred to DFES for advice. We provide that advice and then it is up to the decision-maker to decide, based on our advice and of course a whole range of other expertise from other areas as well.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 446 and legislative reform in paragraph 5. It refers to changes in legislative arrangements such as the modernised Work Health and Safety Act 2020. How does the parliamentary secretary think her government's reforms will affect DFES in relation to work health and safety?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The member would be aware that on 10 November 2020, the Work Health and Safety Bill 2019 was passed as the Work Health and Safety Act 2020 and assented by the Governor. The WHS act and accompanying regulations came into effect on 31 March last year. The WHS act includes volunteers and the definition of "worker", essentially providing volunteers with the same level of protection as an employee. There has been a significant increase in workload within the health and safety services team and other operational support staff at DFES as a result of the new legislation that is being covered. The DFES workforce manages the implementation and ongoing day-to-day, business-as-usual activities associated with the WHS act, particularly the increased focus

from WorkSafe WA inspectors and emergency services volunteers throughout the state. DFES is revising, expanding and developing training materials and resources, developing operating procedures for local government use and developing publications to support the implementation of the legislation, and is in the process of contracting a resource to conduct comprehensive review and update of the DFES safety management system to ensure compliance with the requirements of the WHS act.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is DFES the PCBU—person conducting the business undertaking—in relation to all employees and all volunteers?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will refer to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: Local government is responsible for its volunteers so it would be the PCBU for its own volunteers. We would be the PCBU for our own volunteers and staff.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I want to get clarity, if I can. The parliamentary secretary referred to volunteers in her response, which led me to believe that DFES would cover all employees and all volunteers. Is there another substructure below that, involving local governments?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: DFES covers DFES volunteers and local government covers its own volunteers. Local government has volunteers.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Let us say there is a volunteer bushfire brigade in a local shire out in the bush. The local government is the responsible entity. What are the implications for the training that has to be done? We obviously saw the COVID arrangements last year and who could and could not come onto the fireground. What is the responsibility for training under the Work Health and Safety Act?

[3.20 pm]

Mr C. Waters: We have always had a duty of care, both the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and local government, to our own volunteers. The implication for us as a department is that if we assume control under a section 13 transfer of control, then we assume responsibility for all volunteers on the fireground. Therefore, we would then assume and become the person conducting a business or undertaking for all volunteers in that situation.

Referring to the training issue, we have been proactively speaking with all local governments and offering our training packages to create a level of consistency with that training so there are no anomalies with the level of training that a person may have in responding. That is to give both the local government and DFES a level of comfort that people are appropriately trained and equipped, and have the correct personal protective clothing to respond to an incident.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Just a final comment.

The CHAIR: Is it a question or a comment?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is a comment.

The CHAIR: All right, you may have a final comment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I basically say that I understand why our volunteers in the bush fire brigades are very concerned about these arrangements coming into place last summer. I will leave it at that.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 446 of budget paper No 2 and the table “Spending Changes”, beginning on page 445, and the line item “On-Country Planned Burning Training Program”. Is this program in conjunction with and/or delivered within the Aboriginal rangers program?

Mr M. Carter: That refers to a specific program that has managed to find itself cut across a couple of years through some of the challenges that have been described today. Specifically, we have a memorandum of understanding with the Indigenous Desert Alliance, and the country it looks after cuts across parts of South Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, with a whole raft of traditional owners and, by extension, ranger groups. Through the Bushfire Centre of Excellence, we have joined up in a partnership arrangement through that agreement to bring things together. We are in the process of trialling it now, as we speak, on-country to do some different types of training for on-country Indigenous ranger groups so they can do the types of things and meet some of the desires of back-on-to-country fire management. It is a different type of training from what we would traditionally do in our more structured volunteer arrangements. It is very hands on and field based, with less on the theory side of things, which we try to do in a lot of other work. It is quite innovative and very exciting. There is a lot of interest outside the specific arrangement with the IDA. We enjoy a really healthy partnership with the IDA and I think it will take us ahead further with other traditional owners and ranger groups across the whole of Western Australia. It is a really important piece of work.

Ms L. METTAM: I think Mr Carter touched on this, but can the parliamentary secretary detail where the program is being rolled out and utilised? How many FTE are involved in the program?

Mr M. Carter: This is not specific to that line item, but I am certainly happy to answer the broader remit of the cultural fire program, which I think the member is referring to. This is managed as a specific time-bound project with

the Indigenous Desert Alliance. For the cultural fire program, which is managed by the Bushfire Centre of Excellence, we have two full-time staff dedicated to the program plus another three FTE in the knowledge management function, which are covered in other parts of the budget papers, who deal part-time in that cultural fire space plus perform a range of other functions. Basically, we deal right through. There is a lot of work going on with the rollout of the south west native title claim, so we are doing work with a number of Indigenous groups from the south west and the great southern. Right through from Albany to Esperance is fairly active, and it will certainly be an area of growth for us. We have a small but dedicated crew at the Bushfire Centre of Excellence who basically facilitate. It is about the engagement with the traditional owners and allowing access to the training products that the acting commissioner talked about with our occupational health and safety requirement, but of course it goes much further than that. We want to build in traditional knowledge into our contemporary products and bring them close together. It really is an exciting and expanding area for us. There are a number of dedicated staff. We have a good future ahead of us in that space.

Ms L. METTAM: How many people have been trained so far as part of this training program?

Mr M. Carter: I cannot give a specific number because it is not like the bush fire service training package or a structured package that is aligned to national competencies that people start, finish, do some assessments on and then are awarded a certificate of achievement, and then we can give a number of how many do so. This is basically around coaching and capability building, and people come and go. It is a far more informal and flexible training arrangement. I certainly could not give the member a number. It is not a number we would have.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: After the bushfires over east we heard a lot of commentary about using Indigenous skills in burning and so forth. Are there any examples of implementation? I know Mr Carter said it was being worked towards, but is this being implemented as part of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions prescribed burning program? How is this coming forth in a practical sense?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The member is taking liberties with relating to budget expenditure again, but I defer to Mr Carter.

Mr M. Carter: It is a good question; I thank the member. The language gets interchanged bit. We talk about cultural fire, which is about Indigenous people, and we also talk about traditional fire practice. Traditional fire practice is something we have been doing through DBCA, local government, DFES and many others that use fire as management tool. We have employed traditional practice to a degree. We are aware of it and have had practitioners able to do it for a long time. It is around burning at the right time of the year, patchiness, low-intensity fires and all those sorts of things—to give a few examples that many people would be aware of. The shift now is to garner more knowledge, to have cultural fire built into it, so there is a rewarding experience for traditional owners. It also has a flow-on effect of better fuel management. There is clear evidence of a lot of fire in the landscape before European settlement, and, evidently, wildfires occurred. As fire managers, we would all like to manage fires in lower fuel environments, not with very high fuel loads, and more fire in the landscape is better for the safety of the Western Australian community, better for Indigenous people and better for biodiversity, cultural values and for us all, be it delivered through cultural means, contemporary means or hopefully a combination of both, which is really where we are trying to get to. We are trying to get the point at which we harness collective knowledge. I characterise that in the bush fire space there is traditional fire knowledge, science and research, and contemporary knowledge through lessons learned, and if those three things can all be brought together, we are on a really good path. What we are trying to do summarises where we are heading with it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 446 of budget paper No 2, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” and “Climate Change”. The second paragraph states —

The increasing frequency and intensity of emergencies and climate adaptation policy responses require the Department to enhance the way it works in partnership with the community, the private sector and across Government ...

Can the parliamentary secretary provide examples since ex-tropical cyclone Ellie of what the government is doing to enhance its work with the community, private sector and across government?

[3.30 pm]

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes. As the member rightly pointed out, it is noted within the budget papers that Western Australia has experienced an increase in the frequency and impact of natural disasters over the past decade. A large body of climate change research now exists that indicates the likelihood of more frequent and severe climate-related disaster events in the future. Declining average rainfall in the south and increasing average temperatures are extending the overlap of fire seasons in the north and south of the state, reinforcing the need for DFES to be poised to respond to disasters and support preparedness efforts statewide. It is also increasingly likely that the state will be required to deal with a greater number of concurrent disaster events, requiring greater capacity to manage recovery needs across multiple diverse communities. In 2023, we have already seen an increased frequency and intensity of exceptional weather events—namely, cyclones and floods. Of course, our emergency services are responding to ever-present bushfires and no doubt will be responding to storms in the coming months as well as

other hazardous incidents and rescues. DFES continues to ensure that our emergency services are effectively equipped and trained for all hazards. DFES is increasing bushfire mitigation across the regions, upgrading the state's firefighting assets and capability and strategically placing assets throughout the state based on assessed risk. DFES is also expanding its recovery capability to ensure that it is appropriately resourced to support reconstruction, economic recovery and social wellbeing after a natural disaster or emergency event.

If there are any other particular details that can be provided, I refer to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: Thank you, member. Obviously, with the increased incidence of major incidents, we are doing a lot in the pre-deployment stage and actually pre-deploying resources to high-risk areas. WA is pretty unique compared with other regions in that we have two distinct fire seasons—the north west and the southern bushfire seasons. The southern bushfire season also coincides with the northern cyclone season. In recent years, we have seen an overlapping of both the northern and southern bushfire seasons in conjunction with some fairly robust cyclone and tropical low activity that has come down. We participate in the Australasian Fire Authorities Council network groups in discussing ways to get around climate change and be better prepared to respond to and recover from incidents, and also prepare the community. A lot of our community programs are around preparing the community to not only prepare for the actual incident, but also have the resilience to move on after the event has occurred. We are proactive. In high-threat periods, we have operation preparedness briefings, which are communications with all DFES regions, and we have our heightened threat actions, which basically lift the level of actions that each region undertakes based on the level of risk that they have specifically identified within their own operational response areas. Additionally, we bring on additional aircraft in response.

We have changed from using an Air Crane helicopter to Black Hawk helicopters to give us more resilience and flexibility with our aircraft operations. In the last two fire seasons, we have also brought on additional aircraft to support the grain harvest farming community with its record grain harvest. That has been quite effective. I think the 2021–22 harvest season saw a record 20 million tonnes of grain harvested. Last year, we again worked with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, which again requested our assistance in providing that capability. Last year, I think around 23 million tonnes of grain was harvested. We will review that, based on the risk and the forecasted harvest, for the next year as well. It is about being proactive, making sure we have fit-for-purpose appliances and vehicles, that our air strategy is sufficient and that we have the appropriate resources in the appropriate locations when those risks do present themselves.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thank the acting commissioner for that comprehensive response. I refer to the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 448. About five line items down is “Proportion of responses to Emergency Service Levy One and Emergency Service Levy Two incidents within target timeframes”. Can the parliamentary secretary explain to me what that is?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I thank the member. I will divert to Mr Jon Broomhall, acting deputy commissioner, operations.

Mr J. Broomhall: My understanding is that that is the response to level 1 and level 2 areas in the target time frames. That is the response to emergency service levy 1 areas.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry; could the acting deputy commissioner repeat that? I could not quite pick that up.

Mr J. Broomhall: That is the response to the emergency service levy 1 areas—that is, the metropolitan area—and levy 2 areas.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am still referring to the emergency services levy. I could go back to the delivery of services, if the parliamentary secretary would like me to.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: No; I understand.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There appears to have been, from memory, about a six per cent increase in the emergency services levy in this year's budget. Can someone provide an explanation of what that increase is actually paying for?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: It was an increase of five per cent, member. The emergency services levy is an annual charge levied on land in Western Australia and is the primary funding source for the state's fire and emergency services. The ESL assessed against a property is calculated by multiplying the declared ESL rates by the gross rental value of the property. ESL rates and charges are determined annually in May according to DFES's funding requirements, as approved through the state budget process, and property data provided by Landgate. The impact of the levy on the representative household as published in the state budget papers is taken as the average residential charge for ESL category 1, or ARC cat 1. During this year's budget process, cabinet approved the annual increase in the ARC 1 to be limited to five per cent. Accordingly, an additional consolidated account appropriation of \$30 million has been approved to ensure that the ESL funding requirement for 2023–24 totals \$419 million. As the member can see, it goes into the consolidated account as well. ARC 1 is published in the state budget papers. There was an increase of five per cent. Final ESL rates will be calculated in mid-May, again using updated property valuation data. As a result, the ARC cat 1 for 2023–24 may vary slightly from the published figure.

If other members of my team can speak to specific areas in which the ESL funds are utilised—I will refer to this piece of paper!

The ESL raised in 2023–24 will fund most operational expenditure for the career and volunteer fire and emergency rescue services, volunteer fire and emergency services, state emergency services, volunteer marine rescue services and bushfire services, including volunteer bush fire brigades, the aerial firefighting fleet and the rural fire division. It will also fund the provision of specialist services such as fire investigations, building inspections, emergency planning and community safety programs, as well as activities that support the provision of emergency services delivered by DFES.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thank the parliamentary secretary for that comprehensive response. The five per cent increase through that cabinet process is quite a bit higher than the consumer price index. Is that mainly due to DFES expenses? The parliamentary secretary just quoted a line of various items. Is that increase due to those expenses going up by more than the CPI? Obviously, cost-of-living rates and taxes are all a bit of a challenge at the moment, so an increase of five per cent is quite hefty on our landholders.

[3.40 pm]

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: It is based on the formula that I previously stated, but I will defer to Ms Camarda, the chief financial officer.

Ms G. Camarda: Just so we are clear about the total revenue raised from the emergency services levy this year, we are raising \$418.8 million. That is only a \$1.3 million increase in total ESL revenue raised compared with that raised in the previous year. In 2022–23, we raised \$418.8 million. In 2021–22, we raised \$417.4 million. It is a 0.3 per cent increase in total ESL revenue raised, so that is only about \$1 million extra. When the member talks about the consumer price index, the total ESL revenue is not increasing by CPI. In fact, we did the calculations this week with the most recent property data and the impact of raising \$418.8 million through property owners is a four per cent increase in the average residential charge for category 1. It is not linked to CPI in this instance.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 446 and the “Radio Over Internet Protocol” line item in the spending changes table. Can the parliamentary secretary please explain what exactly the \$247 000 allocated to the radio over internet protocol is going towards?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: An amount of \$247 000 was approved in 2023–24 for operating support costs for the recently completed radio over internet protocol communications system funded through the emergency services levy. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services identified a need for a contemporary statewide ROIP communications system that utilises technology to enable volunteers to monitor radio traffic from any location with Telstra 4G mobile phone coverage, thereby spreading the workload and reducing local burden, particularly on smaller volunteer marine rescue groups, and enabling radio assistance through the entire VMR community.

Initial funding of \$1.8 million was approved in 2018–19, and profiled over the 2019–20 and 2020–21 financial years, for the purchase and implementation of the ROIP technology. As I said, this funding is now about operating support costs. An increase of \$247 000 in the spending changes table for 2023–24 relates to operating costs funded through the emergency services levy and includes technical support and the annual software licensing fee, the virtual private network usage annual cost and VPN SIM cards.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 446 and the operational cost pressures. Can the parliamentary secretary please explain the \$2.55 million expended for operational cost pressures in 2022–23 and the \$141 000 for 2023–24?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The amount of \$141 000 in 2023–24 was approved to cover increased information and communications technology costs and an additional \$2.5 million was secured in 2022–23. I will divert to Ms Camarda, the chief financial officer, for further information on the change.

Ms G. Camarda: We have had some operational cost pressures this financial year that we made application for. It is predominantly associated with increasing costs associated with information and technology. We have had additional costs in relation to our E5 licensing under the government Microsoft enterprise agreement, we have had increasing running costs associated with Microsoft Azure hosting, and cybersecurity costs have increased. We have some respite in relation to the ICT cost pressures we experienced this financial year.

Ms L. METTAM: Is there a reason for the cybersecurity cost increase? Have there been any particular threats? Was this a response to any particular concern?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Cybersecurity is a priority of government across agencies and there are frameworks for agencies to meet. I do not know whether the acting commissioner or anyone on his team has anything to add.

Mr C. Waters: I refer to Patrick Leach.

Mr P. Leach: The short answer is yes, in terms of the risk profile and threat profile. I think everyone is well aware that the technology environment from a cybersecurity perspective is changing rapidly and becoming more risky. In relation to DFES specifically, yes, like most agencies and entities, there are active efforts constantly—as in 24/7—to compromise our security. Part of this is an effort to make sure that we are keeping up with the required standard. To give an example of risk mitigation, I am not sure whether people are aware of the incident that Fire Rescue Victoria had in mid-December. It has about 150 specialist ICT cybersecurity consultants on board. The current estimate is

that it will take it up to two years and in excess of probably \$100 million just to get back to where it was. Therein lies the risk if we do not invest in cybersecurity. The short answer is yes, at a broader level, the risk environment is increasing—and yes, we have seen that at DFES, as have most other organisations.

Ms L. METTAM: What proportion of those additional costs, particularly the \$2.5 million, is related to cybersecurity efforts?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The increased cybersecurity capability costs are \$252 000 per annum.

Ms L. METTAM: I see in the table that there is funding just for this year and next. Is there an ongoing commitment for cybersecurity in another table or is that specifically part of the operational cost pressures?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The additional \$141 000 was approved to cover the increased information and communications technology costs and Ms Camarda has already said what the \$2.5 million can cover. I will revert to Ms Camarda again if there is further information.

Ms G. Camarda: It was one-off additional funding to us for respite for the 2022–23 year and we can make application again next year. However, there is funding that we were able to secure for an emergency services digital strategy, and that will help inform our way forward with cybersecurity. The executive director, Patrick Leach, certainly has more he can share about that.

[3.50 pm]

Mr P. Leach: Yes, absolutely. It is a rather complex story in the sense that as we improve our environmental architecture, potentially the risk reduces, so we require fewer ad hoc security measures—if that makes sense. Part of the digital strategy is how we contemporise or modernise the environment and the architecture that we work with, thereby making it inherently safer in and of itself, requiring less of those post-hoc or ad hoc security measures. Yes, absolutely; we also put in a submission for the WA emergency services digital strategy. Part of that incorporates a whole lot of things—cybersecurity as well, and not just for the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. We work closely with a number of agencies, and we have touched on some of them—the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions; Western Australia Police Force; and Department of Justice. The list goes on. Part of that cybersecurity network is not just DFES related, so we will also leverage off the broader efforts across government.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 450 and the service facilities upgrades under the COVID-19 response in the table of works in progress. In the 2022–23 budget, \$3.743 million was allocated for service facilities upgrades. The estimated expenditure for 2022–23 was \$4.048 million. What led to the \$305 000 overspend?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The estimated expenditure for 2022–23 was \$4.048 million. Where is the overspend?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The budget previously was \$3.743 million. That was in last year's budget.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: In last year's budget papers?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is right. I wonder what the overspend of \$305 000 was for.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: These were COVID-19 boosts to service the volunteer fire and emergency services facilities upgrades. I do not have last year's budget here to refer to to confirm those numbers, but I will divert that to Ms Camarda to see whether she can provide further details.

Ms G. Camarda: The member said that last year's budget papers had \$3.7 million in the 2022–23 —

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It was \$3.743 million.

Ms G. Camarda: What did it have as a projection for 2023–24?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This was for service facilities upgrades.

Ms G. Camarda: Sorry; I do not have those budget papers in front of me. The member has last year's budget papers in front of him, has he not?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, that is my understanding of the question that I have here. The figure is from last year's budget papers. We can let that one go. I will move on to another part of the question about the facilities upgrades. On the same line item, what does the \$3.075 million in the 2023–24 budget relate to? What will that be spent on?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will very happily defer to the acting commissioner to discuss those excellent things.

Mr C. Waters: It is basically for the provision of suitable toilets and change room facilities. Obviously, we have had an increase in female numbers in our volunteer cohort. It is also for suitable decontamination areas for clothing and equipment. It includes a clean-up area for our breathing apparatus, minor appliance bay modifications, specific tunic storage rooms and some upgrades in that space for increased volunteer numbers in some of our brigades, groups and units.

Meeting suspended from 3.54 to 4.07 pm

[Mr S.J. Price took the chair.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 450 of budget paper No 2 and the career fire and rescue service South East Metropolitan Fire Station. In the 2024–25 out year, there is a large figure of \$8.9 million. Will that complete that fire station and is it predicted to wrap up by 30 June 2024?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The CFRS South East Metropolitan Fire Station is now known as the Cardup Fire Station and it will be the home of Western Australia’s newest career fire station as part of a plan to futureproof demand for emergency services in Perth’s burgeoning south-east corridor. Architects Iredale Pederson Hook have been engaged to design the Cardup Fire Station, and they boast a proven track record on major government projects, including Manatj Park, Perth City Link and the Kununurra Courthouse. Figures from the 2021 census reveal that more than 32 000 people now live in the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale, with its population rising more than 80 per cent over the past decade. Operational efficiency, workplace safety and firefighter wellbeing are cornerstones of the fire station’s design. The site, purchased for \$1.3 million, on an arterial road was strategically chosen to minimise response times in an expansive firefighting district. Construction is expected to begin soon, with an estimated completion date of 2024. Having career firefighters based at Cardup Fire Station will help protect the current and future generations of residents who call that beautiful region home.

[4.10 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thank the parliamentary secretary for that comprehensive response. I refer now to page 457 and the heading “Bushfire Risk Management” and the department mitigation works. The 2022–23 estimated actual is \$1.2 million for grain harvest aerial fire suppression, but there is nothing in the 2023–24 budget year. What are the plans going forward, especially in relation to mitigation and aerial fire suppression?

Mr C. Waters: The initial grain harvest strategy was brought on as a trial in consultation with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions given, as I said before, the forecast 20 million tonne grain harvest expected in the 2021–22 harvesting period. We used funding to source that. We did a risk analysis last year, given the record grain harvests forecast, which I think came out to 234 million tonnes of harvested grain for the 2022–23 season. We will do a risk assessment in conjunction with DPIRD in relation to its forecast grain harvest for next year, and we will look at bringing that on again if the risk is there to support local farmers in the community.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the department not budget an amount until it has done an assessment of the crop coming up?

Mr C. Waters: We have done two for the grain harvest strategies so far—the initial trial, and then the follow-up season for the last grain harvest was based purely on risk. We do not really know what the risk is at this point, but in the next few months, we will again consult DPIRD, local governments and also the grain harvesting areas, in consultation with our partners at DBCA, on how we will introduce that, and we will then seek funding to do that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Aerial fire suppression still remains part of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services’ budgeting activities alongside DBCA. How is that shared?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will divert to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: Aerial operations is basically part of our operations. We provide a number of either rotary or fixed-wing aircraft, which is our standard fleet. Last year we brought on two Black Hawk helicopters for a high-lift large capacity capability of 4 500 litres, which replaced the historical Air Crane aircraft we had, which carried 8 000 litres. It gave us a lot more flexibility. We also brought on a large air tanker for the first time last year purely for a WA asset that we had. For a short period of time, we also had a national large air tanker based out of the Busselton Margaret River Airport. Our air operations fleet, including our air intelligence and our surveillance aircraft, is purely budgeted for out of that. This is a grain harvest strategy in support of our farming community. When the risk is elevated to the level at which we feel we can provide additional resources, we either bring on aircraft earlier or extend them to the back of the harvest period fleet. We brought on two teams for the trial last year—so, four fixed-wing water bombers plus two aerial intelligence supervision aircraft.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What about their use for part of this particular grain harvest, with the likes of private operators like South East Air Ag and other private operators? Are they part of the mix or is it purely these larger water bombers that are brought in?

Mr C. Waters: These are existing procurements. We just bring them on early. They are contracts we have in place on a supply-when-needed arrangement. We bring them on early.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My next question relates to unallocated crown land, which is just below the reference to “Grain Harvest—Aerial Fire Suppression” on the same page. There is a fairly constant level of funding through the budget years. Does all of the budgeted amount of \$3 million emanate from emergency services levy funding?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: DFES and the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage have a longstanding agreement to mitigate bushfire risk on unallocated crown land and unmanaged reserves. An MOU details the responsibilities of DFES for managing land on behalf of the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage. I will defer to Mr Murray Carter for further information.

Mr M. Carter: I thank the member for the question. The member will see in the line item immediately below that it is \$500 000 year. This is a constant; it was \$450 000 some years ago. It has increased. The MOU in the lands component of the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage that the parliamentary secretary referred to splits unallocated crown land and unmanaged reserves—hence UCL and UMR—that are within town sites under the management of DFES, which we are accountable for on its behalf, and outside to DBCA. It then provides us with \$500 000 a year and has done for some period of time under its MOU. The rural reforms expanded our bushfire risk management some four or five years ago. We augmented that when the ESL funding was made available in the broad mitigation space, which we have spoken about a fair bit this afternoon. That \$3 million constant figure across the budget out years reflects an augmentation of further work conducted directly by DFES on those UCL and UMR parcels within regional town sites, and metropolitan sites for that matter as well, right across Western Australia. It has been a significant uplift in addition to the money provided by the lands component that we have used to treat the highest risk. Although they are often small parcels of land, they are incredibly important in their positioning—often within the rural urban interface.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: In relation to that, let us use an example of the Fitzgerald River National Park, where the water bomber went down. I assume that was under the DBCA. Is there a blend of funding that funds that type of bomber in that unallocated crown land in the reserve?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will revert to Mr Carter.

Mr M. Carter: That particular incident the member referred to was a national park fire. Under the Conservation and Land Management Act, DBCA manages lands. We were augmenting the response capability effort in terms of what we generally do across agencies. It was funded through the normal DBCA operations for its part, and the operation was squarely under its control. It is not at all linked to the two budget items we were discussing.

[4.20 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: If crown land is transferred to the Noongar land estate, would the Noongar regional corporations then pay the emergency services levy?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will divert the question to Mr Murray Carter again.

Mr M. Carter: Really closely related to that question is an undertaking we made with the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage that we will continue; we will not drop that. In terms of the south west native title claim, as capability is built up by the ranger groups and the owners of those lands, we will transition out of that. When we are currently funded by Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage for those parcels, we will negotiate an exit strategy when they are up to speed to be able to pick that up. We certainly will not leave the community at risk in the transition phase.

How the ESL is levied across parcels of land is not my area of expertise, so I could not answer that part of the question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Whose area of expertise is it? This is DFES, so we are talking about the ESL levy. I am happy for anyone else to respond.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: That is unknown at this stage. I am happy to look into that further for the member if he wishes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will the parliamentary secretary provide that as supplementary information?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes.

The CHAIR: Can you please confirm what you are going to provide, parliamentary secretary?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: It is my understanding that the member wishes to know whether the traditional owners will be responsible for paying the emergency services levy if DPLH land is transferred to traditional owners.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Spot on.

[*Supplementary Information No B12.*]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It looks like I am losing all of my co-members here, but I will press on. I want to go back to page 450. Paragraph 1.2 states —

\$22.4 million for ongoing vehicle replacement programs in line with the Department's maintenance and serviceable life replacement strategies;

We visited this to some extent earlier. My question is: how many vehicles are due for replacement in 2023–24 and how is serviceable life replacement determined?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Mr Leach answered this relatively comprehensively earlier in terms of how vehicles and appliances are assessed on an ongoing basis. Does the member wish to revisit that?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I felt there was a lack of clarity about how the department determines that the serviceable life is over, if you like. The specific question is: how many vehicles are due for replacement in the 2023–24 year? We have allocated \$22.4 million to it, so there must be a number of vehicles that that will pay for.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will divert the question to Mr Leach again to expand further than earlier.

Mr P. Leach: Just to reiterate, in terms of the earlier answer, it probably is not accurate to refer to a vehicle replacement program with the sort of modality of one coming in and one going out. The parliamentary secretary earlier went through in quite a bit of detail all the appliances that we have procured and sourced and are becoming operational. That is one side of that equation, but there is not a direct linear correlation to X number of vehicles coming out on the other side. That goes back to the response that I provided earlier. It is a case-by-case basis.

In terms of the mechanism that the member mentioned and how that happens, as I touched on before, we have a variety of different appliances that have different operational requirements. The operational personnel, whether volunteers or career firefighters, do their own vehicle checks and maintenance reports. If they see a fault with the vehicle, they will lodge a vehicle fault report. That goes through either the workshops or relevant specialist technicians who make a determination about whether that vehicle can be repaired and remain serviceable. There is no direct linear correlation between those two things with new vehicles coming into the fleet and vehicles that become unserviceable moving out of the fleet. The characterisation as a replacement program probably muddies the water a bit.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I guess that is where I find it slightly confusing, because it says “ongoing vehicle replacement programs”, so I would have thought that means there are 30 new vehicles for \$20.4 million. That is what I am trying to get to. I understand what the department is saying, but I am just going by the paragraph that says the department has an ongoing vehicle replacement program. I am just trying to ascertain how many vehicles that will add to the fleet, if you like. It appears that we are not really going to progress any further on that one.

I want to go to page 453 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and refer to the line item “Volunteer Fuel Card”. It is the second-bottom line in that table. My first question is: what are the eligibility requirements for this card?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Card scheme was introduced in 2015–16. The cards are preloaded with \$1 000 and are sent to volunteer groups throughout WA. The cards can be used to purchase fuel by registered volunteers who actively contribute to either operational or support activities in their community. The cards are small tokens of appreciation for emergency services volunteers, including St John Ambulance personnel who may need to travel long distances in personal vehicles. Under the previous government, there was no sustainable funding for the scheme. The McGowan government reviewed the source of funding and use of the card and extended the program to provide volunteers with certainty. The process has been streamlined so that eligible volunteers no longer need to make applications for the cards, which will be automatically issued.

This government has again secured the funding in the 2023–24 budget and forward years from the royalties for regions community service fund. For 2022–23, emergency services volunteers will be provided fuel cards, with a total value of \$1.07 million. Approximately 930 DFES brigades, groups and units and St John Ambulance units are able to access the fuel cards. In 2022–23, 870 received fuel cards, which was similar to 2021–22. This included 788 in regional areas and 82 in the metropolitan area. These volunteers are driven by a desire to help the community, but these cards provide some assistance as they go about their duties.

In terms of eligibility—I spoke about eligible volunteers—I will defer to the acting commissioner.

Mr C. Waters: All active volunteers can use the card and predominantly the captain or team leader of the brigade group or unit will allocate a certain amount based on the active member numbers and either meet them at the garage—which a lot of the brigades do—and do it in bulk so every member gets to fill up their tank or give them the card and authorise them to expend a certain amount of money on fuel.

[4.30 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Very good; thank you for that. Of the funding, what proportion is from the royalties for regions fund versus the consolidated account?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: A sum of \$1 million is from royalties for regions.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Why will total funding for the Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Card decrease by \$50 000 in the final out year?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The out years may change over time and the number will change depending on volunteer numbers and what have you. I cannot give a specific answer on why it is \$50 000 less. I presume it is based on projections.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you. I think that might wrap it up.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Before we wrap up, we agreed to provide to the member some supplementary information on grants acquittal and funds, which we may already have for him now. Would the member like that information now?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is it an answer to just one of the questions?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: It is supplementary information we agreed to provide on the amount of grants still available.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, I am happy to receive that now.

Ms G. Camarda: I think the question was on the estimates for the recovery and resilience grants under the tropical cyclone Seroja package. The original estimation for those grants was \$45 million; however, the recent forecast is \$20 million. That \$20 million is forecast to be spent against those grants. Does that answer the member's question?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, that is fine. Thanks to the parliamentary secretary and all the advisers. It is much appreciated.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 21: WA Health, Medical Research, \$64 775 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms H.M. Beazley, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Medical Research.

Ms A. Kelly, Acting Director General.

Mr R. Anderson, Acting Deputy Director General.

Mr O. Pincott, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 302 and the \$222 million available in the fund for medical research across the forward estimates. How much of this is new funding and how much is existing research-related funding, as outlined in footnote (a), that has been added to this amount?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: For the future health research and innovation fund, which I will call the FHRI fund, for 2022–23, it is projected that \$17.2 million will be expended on future health research and innovation and medical research and innovation funding programs and initiatives. For further information regarding time frames of the FHRI fund, I divert to the acting director general.

Ms A. Kelly: The additional funding is \$84.2 million. That is what is being added this year. Spread over the forward estimates, \$64 million has been spent through the FHRI fund, with 364 grant applicants received over that period.

Ms L. METTAM: I see it is noted here, but can the parliamentary secretary clarify the other medical research budgeted expenditure that makes up the \$64 million?

Ms A. Kelly: That amount is made up of four key areas. The WA Child Research Fund of \$4 million is co-funded by the state government and Channel Seven's Telethon Trust. It supports research aimed at improving outcomes for child and adolescent health across the state. There is \$4.887 million for activities to support WA Health. That is largely in innovation. We support the WA Health translation network and the Human Research Ethics Committee and we have a range of sponsorships and grants. An amount of \$2.8 million for research and innovation operational costs is largely the salaries of the team within the Department of Health for the office of medical research and innovation. There is still \$925 000 in past grant payments that we are paying out.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the parliamentary secretary provide who decides and what the process is for which projects will receive funding each year?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Is that in terms of eligibility for the fund or the assessment of applications?

Ms L. METTAM: It is on eligibility and how they are selected. What is the process? Is the decision made by the Department of Health?

Ms A. Kelly: The Future Health Research and Innovation Advisory Council is a panel of eminent experts to whom a series of options for programs and initiatives are provided. The members are canvassed from a range of stakeholders, including the department and health service providers. They also come out of open days. We now have medical research and innovation open days with some of our key stakeholders. The initiatives come through that. We have had a range of initiatives, including fellowships, the clinical entrepreneur program, Near-miss Awards, research translation projects, implementation for science fellowships and translation fellowships. There is a range of programs.

[4.40 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: Can the parliamentary secretary provide the make-up of that selection panel? I assume who sits on the selection panel for research grants for these projects is publicly available.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will again divert the question to the acting director general.

Ms A. Kelly: We will call a round of applications for grant funding and separate panels will be set up. They will not be the same, and they are not run by the Department of Health. We take advice from individuals throughout the research sector or associated with it, and that includes the medical life sciences sector as well. A range of individuals will rate and score applications that come in, and that is done quite independently. Those ratings will then be brought together and the grants determined from that.

Ms L. METTAM: Who leads that independent process?

Ms A. Kelly: The Department of Health oversees the independent process and provides support and guidance through that process.

Ms L. METTAM: It is an independent process, so is there a selection body or a board that is outside the Department of Health or is it within the department? I am trying to get an understanding of the workings.

Ms A. Kelly: There is no discrete board. The Future Health Research and Innovation Fund Advisory Council sits well and truly above it and oversees the allocation of the future health research and innovation fund to a series of programs and initiatives. There are then the panels, or those independents. They come through into the department, and the department provides that advice to the advisory council and the minister.

Ms L. METTAM: Do the members of the advisory panel come from outside the Department of Health? Do they come from industry?

Ms A. Kelly: The advisory council is chaired by John Van Der Wielen and has—hopefully I will get all the members right—Dale Fisher, Glenn Begley, Kane Blackman and there is another member I cannot recall. The names are public and are on the website. They are very independent, both within the state and external to it.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the parliamentary secretary provide, perhaps by way of supplementary information, a list of projects that received funding in 2021–22 and 2022–23, as well as the amount provided?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes, member, I can. I can provide the programs and initiatives that were supported by the FHRI fund from 2020–21 to May 2023.

Ms L. METTAM: Great; I thank the parliamentary secretary. Since its inception, has any particular research group received successive grants? I imagine that might be the case in WA.

Ms A. Kelly: Yes, they have. I do not have a list of those available, but some groups have, as have some individuals. Some of the grants are awarded to individuals as well. Yes, there have been.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the parliamentary secretary able to provide that by way of supplementary information as well?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes, it will be captured in the list that we will give to the member. We will make sure that it is comprehensive.

Ms C.M. TONKIN: I refer to page 302 of budget paper No 2 and paragraph 46, which highlights funding of \$222 million over the forward estimates for investment in our local health and medical research ecosystem through the future health research and innovation fund. Given Western Australia's unique geographical landscape and the future health and research innovation fund's focus on Aboriginal, rural and remote health, can the parliamentary secretary please provide an update on initiatives funded in the 2023–24 budget to address these challenges?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: That is a great question. Back in October 2022, the Minister for Medical Research issued a global challenge for a world-leading medical research and innovation solution to resolve the pressing problem of health services delivery in the Pilbara. Applicants were encouraged to think outside the box, with the best solution to win a \$5 million prize funded by the FHRI fund and partners BHP and Rio Tinto.

There have been 93 applications received from a mix of innovators, researchers, start-ups and established companies from across the globe, including Australia, India, the United States of America, parts of South-East Asia and Europe. The 10 finalists, who are yet to be announced, will each be provided with a \$100 000 grant to support a 12-month proof-of-concept stage commencing in August 2023 and concluding in July 2024. We are looking for an outcome that harnesses new technology, employs digital health to its full potential and ensures that all Western Australians can access the health services they need and deserve.

I look forward to seeing what innovations and technologies the challenge reveals to improve health care and support thriving communities in the Pilbara.

Ms L. METTAM: Given the significant benefits for medical research and the significant surplus the state is receiving, was any consideration given to increasing the future health research and innovation fund?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The FHRI fund is well resourced, which is shown by the number of programs and initiatives it has been able to support since its inception. I am just seeing whether there is any further information I can provide the member. It is all good news stories! I will divert to the acting director general for any further information.

Ms A. Kelly: The increase that has come through in this budget is largely due to the interest rates allocated to the fund. It is a sovereign fund, so interest from that fund comes into health and medical research. That is why there is the significant increase for this year and over the forward estimates.

Ms L. METTAM: My question was really about whether, given the extraordinary boom the state is experiencing and the opportunity to diversify the economy, there had been any discussion about expanding the investment in this fund, given the significant return on investment?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The amount for the FHRI fund is determined by its governing act. It is a percentage of another set of figures. That is where the FHRI fund amount comes from, as per legislation.

[4.50 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I refer again to page 296 and the future health research and innovation fund. The 2026–27 forward estimate is roughly double that of previous years. Why is that the case?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will divert to the acting director general.

Ms A. Kelly: When we had last year's budget, that 2026–27 amount was not shown. That is the full year's amount. The spending change is the full year.

Ms L. METTAM: What percentage of the current funding supports projects in the WA public health system and the wider WA Health and medical research innovation sectors?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: When we provide the member with the table of all the grants, programs and initiatives that the future health research and innovation fund is supporting, she will be able to determine that from that table. I do not think we have the percentages between private and public readily available. All that information will be in that table and the member will be able to determine the program initiatives that are being supported.

Ms L. METTAM: Are research projects undertaken by individuals working in health service providers eligible? Are individual employees of the Department of Health who work in various HSPs eligible for this fund?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will divert to the acting director general.

Ms A. Kelly: Thank you. Yes, researchers from the WA Health sector can apply, and some have been awarded grants, across a range of our health service providers.

Ms L. METTAM: In those circumstances, are there issues with intellectual property? I understand that there have been some recent issues involving individuals, or an individual in particular who has been working within an HSP who has developed their own intellectual property. Has that issue of who owns that research capability been resolved? I understand that we have to talk in general terms, but I understand there are currently and have been some ongoing challenges in IP for researchers working in an HSP who utilise those resources but develop their own research capability. Can the parliamentary secretary provide some clarification about what the government is doing to try to iron out and provide better clarity around those issues?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I thank the member. All answers will have to be very general. I also point out that this is not actually relating to any expenditure in the budget, so the answer will be limited, but I will defer to the acting director general.

Ms A. Kelly: Thank you. All grant agreements include clauses relating to intellectual property, and they have been clarified over a number of years. There may be instances from some years ago whereby perhaps the clarity around that did not make it easy for individuals. I am not being clear because some of the issues are ongoing and I need to protect that. The good thing is that a new intellectual property has been released this week that will provide greater certainty and greater clarity for the public sector, and particularly for those researchers in health service providers.

Ms L. METTAM: The acting director general said that a document providing further clarity has been released this week. I did not catch the name of the document. Is it an intellectual property document or a policy paper of the Department of Health?

Ms A. Kelly: I would like to take credit for it, but it is definitely not mine. It is a government policy that has been released this week.

The CHAIR: There is one piece of housekeeping. Parliamentary secretary, you agreed to provide a list of grant recipients, I think. Do you want to do that through supplementary information?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes, I will provide it as supplementary information. It is for the future health research and innovation fund programs and initiatives that have received funding between 2020–21 and May 2023.

[*Supplementary Information No B13.*]

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 3: Department of the Premier and Cabinet — Service 5, Innovation and the Digital Economy, \$32 185 000 —

Mr C.M. Collins, Chair.

Ms H.M. Beazley, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Innovation and the Digital Economy.

Ms E. Roper, Director General.

Mr G. Italiano, Government Chief Information Officer.

Mr P. Bouhla, Chief Information Security Officer.

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

Mr A. Degli Esposti, Chief Technology Officer.

Mr J. Petersen, Chief Digital Officer.

Mr O. Pincott, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

[5.00 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 62 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the significant issues impacting the agency. Down under “Digital Transformation” I notice that the department is “supporting and coordinating the digital transformation of the WA public sector” and it “continues to build services by integrating more services into the ServiceWA App”. How many people now use the ServiceWA app?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: As of March 2023, 1.4 million people have downloaded the ServiceWA app.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: If 1.4 million people have downloaded the app, are 1.4 million people using it? How does that compare with usage when it was mandatory to sign in?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Obviously, the numbers would be going down because we are no longer in the mandatory COVID-19 check-in period. I will refer to Mr Italiano if there is further information at hand.

Mr G. Italiano: I do not have the precise figures around daily usage available. I concur with the view that it has decreased from the height of its use during COVID. I do not have the number of daily users available here today.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I just opened mine for the first time in a very long time so I am sure that is correct. How much data can be usefully gathered if usage of the app is down?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will defer to Mr Italiano. I am not sure whether more clarity might be needed around the question.

Mr G. Italiano: If the question is, “Do we have data on usage?”, the answer is yes, we do. We are able to obtain statistics about the use of the app. That is possible. The fact that usage may have dropped does not prevent us from obtaining statistics.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What will the \$4 million for app operation deliver?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: In terms of the technicalities of what will be delivered through that funding, I will refer to Mr Italiano.

Mr G. Italiano: The \$4.857 million as indicated is for the operation of the app. I can outline what that funding is expended on. Funding is used on specialist contracted ICT resources, software subscription licences, managed services and infrastructure that supports the app. This is the ongoing cost of maintaining the app, keeping it secure and up to date and keeping the infrastructure on which it is held secure and contemporary.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As part of that further expenditure, has security been tightened up? I am referring in part to the scenario in which, I understand, the WA Police Force accessed information from the app. What changes have been made in relation to that?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: As we all know, there is increasing activity of cybersecurity incidents culminating in an increasing risk to WA government systems. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet's Office of Digital Government is the lead agency for cybersecurity in the WA government. I will defer again to Mr Italiano to talk about the security of the data.

Mr G. Italiano: The member referred to WA police accessing SafeWA, or sometimes called in check-in data. That was not a breach of security. At the time that it was accessed, it was a lawful and authorised use of that particular data.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Mr Italiano said that it was not a breach. Is that pathway no longer used by the WA Police Force?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: We passed urgent legislation to ensure that police were no longer accessing ServiceWA app data.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is WA looking at introducing a digital driver's licence, similar to other states, that may be used on the ServiceWA app?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I know digital drivers' licences are a hot topic of conversation, and I will divert to Mr Italiano.

Mr G. Italiano: We are undertaking planning activities to ascertain the requirements and potential costs of introducing a digital driver's licence. We have the benefit of being able to access the costs of implementation in other Australian jurisdictions to understand the complexity and cost of that work; however, at this stage we are still in the planning phase and it will be subject to a future decision of government.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: If and when that digital driver's licence comes in and potentially comes onto the ServiceWA app, I am assuming that people will still be able to use their "hardcopy" card. Will it be an optional arrangement or will there be a point in time at which it will become automatic that people will need to have it in a digital format?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: As Mr Italiano said, the research is happening now in terms of a proposal for a digital driver's licence. We have a digital inclusivity strategy to help those who otherwise would have difficulty accessing digital sources. The director general has just confirmed with me what I was about to say—that there is no intention at this point in time of making a digital driver's licence the only driver's licence available for Western Australians.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 63 of budget paper No 2 under the heading "Cyber Security" in the significant issues impacting the agency. Reference is made to a number of initiatives to improve the government's cybersecurity. Can the parliamentary secretary elaborate on what these initiatives are and how they have improved our cybersecurity?

[5.10 pm]

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: As I outlined earlier, this department is the lead government agency for cybersecurity. The department has introduced a number of initiatives to strengthen cybersecurity across the WA public sector. The department will continue to lead, coordinate and support whole-of-government cybersecurity efforts to protect the government's information, assets and service delivery from cyber threats. In November 2021, the WA government allocated \$25.5 million in additional funding to the cybersecurity unit within DGov. This allocation included \$4.6 million to establish a cybersecurity uplift team to strengthen the cybersecurity of agency networks through enhanced technical guidance, improved verification and direct implementation; \$2.2 million to establish a hunt and incident response team to provide a dedicated advanced incident response capability to manage incident responses and threats; and \$14.7 million to expand the WA government security operations centre—the SOC. The security operations centre was first established in 2021, a first for Western Australia and the first of its kind in Australia. The SOC provides enhanced visibility of the cyber threats against agencies' networks and improves the government's ability to detect and respond to cybersecurity incidents. The additional funding for the digital capability fund has enabled the expansion of the SOC's activities, including enhanced testing of agencies' cybersecurity defences, and the SOC currently provides services to 66 WA government entities.

The Office of Digital Government continues to assist the uplift of public sector cybersecurity maturity through the implementation of the WA government cybersecurity policy, which requires agencies to implement a robust baseline of cybersecurity controls to better manage their cyber risks; issuing the Premier's circular on cybersecurity measures to WA government entities; establishing a vulnerability scanning service to provide agencies with the tools required to quickly identify vulnerabilities and missing patches in their system, and, to date, 21 agencies have onboarded to the VSS; a penetration testing program that tests cybersecurity defences within agencies; collaborating with domestic and international security organisations to inform agencies of known vulnerabilities and threats to their networks, and, since January 2023, DGov has issued 88 security alerts to agencies; participating in exercises to test and improve cyber incident coordination and response procedures; incorporating cybersecurity as a hazard into the state's emergency management arrangements; and partnering with Australia's national identity and cyber support service, IDCARE, to provide a 24/7 incident response capability and specialist case management service to support community members impacted by cybersecurity incidents.

Ms L. METTAM: As the parliamentary secretary will be aware, the Auditor General tabled a report in March after a systems audit uncovered 13 cases in which cybersecurity deficiencies were so significant that the relevant agencies'

records could not be trusted. The number of agencies that have fallen into this category has doubled since last year. The report found that, in addition to those cases, almost nine out of 10 agencies failed to meet the required standard for end-point security. I could go on, but a number of issues were raised. In light of the commitments that the parliamentary secretary has just outlined, what assurance can she provide that the government is addressing these issues urgently?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: That is a question about a report of the Office of the Auditor General, not about these budget papers or expenditure.

Ms L. METTAM: The Auditor General's report highlights significant gaps in the way that the government is dealing with cybersecurity. What assurance can the parliamentary secretary provide that those significant issues are being addressed?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Again, that question is not about anything in these budget papers. However, I have just outlined the significant priority investment that the government is making in cybersecurity through all the initiatives that I just listed, and then some, and by working with agencies to ensure that they are safe and secure. It is an absolute priority of government, but I have already outlined all the programs related to cybersecurity.

Ms L. METTAM: What efforts have been made or where are we at with the removal of TikTok from government phones, as directed by the Premier? Can the parliamentary secretary confirm that all government phones no longer have TikTok on them?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: That is not related to these budget papers. That is a policy issue.

Ms L. METTAM: Given that it is a cybersecurity risk or threat, I would imagine that it would be relevant to that line item.

The CHAIR: That is not a question, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Paragraph 3 on page 63 refers to the whole-of-government cybersecurity efforts to protect the government's information, assets and service delivery from cyber threats. I think it is a perfectly relevant question.

The CHAIR: If you ask the question in those terms, you might get an answer.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given what I have just said about that budget item, can the parliamentary secretary comment on the Premier's directive to remove TikTok from everyone's phones and how it is progressing?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Thank you, member, for relating it to the budget papers. I will defer to Mr Italiano.

Mr G. Italiano: The directive has been issued. The nature of the removal of TikTok from devices means that it has to be done at the agency level; there is no central capability to carry out some automatic technical execution to remove it. We have issued the directive and we have provided a follow-up with agencies, and we are currently getting responses from agencies to indicate to us whether the removal has occurred. Device management will vary from agency to agency. Some agencies will have device management in place that will allow them to remotely understand whether that has occurred; smaller agencies may not have that sophistication. But we are following up to check on it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It sounds as though there is a regimented approach. It might be being done at different rates by different departments, but there is an approach that will see a beginning and an end to making sure that TikTok is removed from all those devices.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will again divert the question to Mr Italiano.

Mr G. Italiano: That is certainly our expectation.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 62 of volume 1 of budget paper No 2. In the table of spending changes, the line item "Western Australia Police Force—Independent Audit" has an amount of \$250 000. This of course comes under the digital capability fund. What are the aims of this audit and what is being audited specifically?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will divert this to Mr Italiano.

Mr G. Italiano: The allocation referred to by the member is to the Office of Digital Government to undertake the audit. When matters relating to the digital capability fund are considered under Expenditure Review Committee and budget processes, additional recommendations can be made about certain decisions. In consideration of the Western Australia Police Force submission at the most recent state budget, a recommendation was added that an audit be carried out to assess current expenditure in the WA Police Force and that is why that allocation has been made.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry; I would like that last sentence or two to be repeated, if possible.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I divert the question to Mr Italiano.

Mr G. Italiano: In this instance, what lies at the heart of the item is that in the ICT operations of most agencies, there will be a delineation between that which is required for baseline operations—so, ongoing recurrent funding, which is often referred to as keeping-the-lights-on-type funding—and funding that is sought to do new projects at additional capabilities. What lies at the heart of this item is to establish that current recurrent ongoing operational support, and we need to provide that information back for government consideration.

[5.20 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What issues were identified to warrant the audit, and who is undertaking the audit?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will divert that to Mr Italiano.

Mr G. Italiano: The issue that was identified is adequately delineating between the ongoing operational cost and new initiatives that the Western Australia Police Force wishes to undertake. Who will undertake the audit is yet to be decided. I have sought a submission from WA Police Force in the first instance. When I have received that submission, we will form a view about the scope, scale and nature of the audit that needs to be undertaken.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I ask once again about page 62 and the Western Australia public safety network strategy under the digital capability fund in the table “Spending Changes”. What is the objective of this strategy?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The Department of the Premier and Cabinet will commission \$1 million for the development of this strategy, and it will set the strategic context for investment in the state’s public safety communications capabilities and infrastructure for the next decade.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Why has \$1 million been provided only for this year, with no further funding in the out years?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: It is for the development of the strategy, not necessarily what will come from the strategy in ongoing works.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 14: Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation — Services 1 to 7, Innovation and the Digital Economy, \$427 005 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms H.M. Beazley, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Innovation and the Digital Economy.

Mrs R. Brown, Director General.

Ms L. Dawson, Deputy Director General.

Mr A. Dolling, Executive Director, Science and Innovation.

Mr J. O’Hare, Executive Director, Industry Development.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr O. Pincott, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

Do we have any questions? Member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 194 and growing innovation and the digital economy. Where are the four innovation hubs located, and how much has been allocated to each of the hubs?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Since 2017, the new industries fund has co-funded three innovation hubs that look to help develop emerging industries, such as data science and artificial intelligence, life science and cybersecurity. Each hub is governed by a unit with a university partner. Curtin University is the partner in the data science case; the University of Western Australia, in life sciences; and Edith Cowan University, for cyber. In 2022, a fourth hub was announced, the WA creative tech innovation hub, which is now known as creative tech village, and that will be located in Bunbury. The life sciences hub is now funded by the Department of Health. Each hub is governed through a detailed financial assistance agreement, an advisory board of independent experts and a steering committee made up of the major partners.

The hubs are not spaces in themselves but are more about developing the emerging industry in question. They do this by organising major conferences and regular events, providing assistance and mentoring to individual startups, writing grants, and providing connections to potential investors and advisers. Each hub works to a specific work development plan and reports back on its key performance indicators. Each hub has \$1.2 million over four years.

For each location other than Bunbury, I will divert that question to the director general. They are all Perth-based hubs.

Ms L. METTAM: Where is the hub in Bunbury?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: It is to be located in Bunbury. I will divert that to the director general to see whether an exact location has been found.

Mrs R. Brown: It is located at the ECU campus.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 193 and paragraph 10.1, which relates to building skills in science, technology, engineering and maths, or STEM. Has the STEM strategy been fully implemented?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: That is under the remit of the Minister for Science.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is it in the wrong section?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Sadly, yes.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 195 and the “Service Summary” table. The funding for science and innovation falls from \$49 million in 2022–23 to \$38 million in 2026–27. Can the parliamentary secretary advise why this funding is falling?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Can the member let me know again the line item that she is referring to? I missed it. Was it line item 4, “Science and Innovation”?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes, science and innovation.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will divert the question to the director general, who may divert it again, but in the first instance, I will divert it to the director general.

[5.30 pm]

Mrs R. Brown: The decrease in funding is the phasing out of programs under the new industries fund. It is a four-year funded program.

Ms L. METTAM: What programs or projects will be impacted as a result or are reflected in this change?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The length of time for what the NIF has been funding has been taken into consideration. For further information, I divert to the director general.

Mrs R. Brown: Many of the programs that run throughout the forward estimates are time-limited grant programs; they are not continuing. In a sense, no projects of a longer time frame are impacted. They are very short, sharp grants to various projects or initiatives. A small number continue from the past couple of years, including funding for various hubs. But the decline in funding is really where those grant programs are delivered through that period, so there is no impact.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 190 of the *Budget statements* and significant issues impacting the agency. Paragraph 2 refers to tight labour market conditions. To what extent is WA suffering a shortage of key personnel within the digital and innovation economy, and how is that being presented? What impact is that having?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I divert that to the director general.

Mrs R. Brown: The budget paper is referring more generally to the tight labour market conditions. With regard to the digital industry, a core aspect of the digital economy strategy is about building into the future a more viable, robust and innovative digital economy industry here in Western Australia. It does not get to the specifics of current labour market shortages, but it is very much about acknowledging the strength of Western Australia and how that is leveraged. Through the parliamentary secretary, I will defer to Linda Dawson.

Ms L. Dawson: We also have a digital economy industry forum that the minister attends; that occurs on a quarterly basis and has industry representation. All the innovation hubs attend, as does the Office of Digital Government. We talk about a number of issues at that forum, but it is more about skilling. The concern that has been raised is more about how we upskill and how we prepare industry for top-up as it automates and adds digital programs into its capabilities. Pathways to procurement is another topic, and certainly digital connectivity. A discussion around a shortage of skills has not occurred since I have been involved in that forum. Certainly conversations around digital inclusion occur. We are keen to continue to work with the universities and the TAFE sector on micro-credentials for top-up skills.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 192 and paragraph 7.1. The member for Roe was going to ask this.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, I will flow on from that given my education portfolio. What digital initiatives have been undertaken to assist the international education sector by developing and implementing initiatives to attract, retain and grow the pipeline of students from key international markets?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: That is a question for the Minister for International Education.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There you go—that is why she gave it to me!

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 192, paragraph 7.5 of significant issues that relates to the key aspects of the *Health and medical life sciences industry strategy*. Can I ask about that?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: That is a question for Minister Cook as it is industry and strategy.

Ms L. METTAM: How about the new industries fund?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: Great. Hold on to your seats! Page 194 refers to the \$9.1 million expansion of the new industries fund. How will that funding be used to drive innovation?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The Western Australian government has committed, as the member indicated, an additional \$9.1 million to boost the new industries fund across the next two financial years, 2023–24 and 2024–25. Every dollar invested by the government through the NIF generates a gross value-add of between \$1.30 and \$5.20. The additional funding is to support innovators realise their potential, help diversify the economy and create jobs. To that effect, there is \$500 000 to support the pre-eminent tech festival in Western Australia, West Tech Fest, over two years, as its funding ended in 2023; \$2 million for female and Indigenous founders, boosting their support through existing grant programs and the innovation booster grant and the Extend WA grant; \$2 million for regional entrepreneur support to boost regional innovators through existing grant programs as specific regional sponsorships; \$2.2 million for commercialisation bridge grants, a new grant program based on the successful innovation booster grant, but with a higher quantum of up to \$150 000 a grant; \$2.4 million for the Plus Eight Accelerator and Perth Landing Pad that are both run by external parties and can double the number and impact of startups going through the accelerator and increase the number of regional tech companies attracted to Perth through the landing zone; and \$500 000 for the digital economy strategy that can then be developed by the team during the next financial year.

Ms L. METTAM: What is the decision-making process for allocating funds under the new industries fund?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I will revert to the director general.

Mrs R. Brown: Consistent with all our grant processes, we issue EOIs. We have open rounds and some time-limited rounds. They go through a rigorous internal assessment through the department. There is an independent assessment panel and it makes recommendations for the awarding of grants.

Ms L. METTAM: How much of the \$9.1 million was allocated to female and Indigenous founders?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: It was an amount of \$2 million.

Ms L. METTAM: How much was the original new industries fund and how was it allocated?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Is the member asking how much was allocated when it was first launched?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

[5.40 pm]

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Initially, \$16.7 million was allocated over four years.

Ms L. METTAM: It was originally a \$16 million fund over four years. When did that program start?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: It started in 2017.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to “Growing Innovation and the Digital Economy”, particularly the reference to early stage venture funds on page 194 of budget paper No 2.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: This relates to our government’s Western Australian venture support pilot program. As we know, a vibrant innovation ecosystem requires a flourishing early stage investor sector. Angel investors and high-net-worth individuals usually provide funding to early stage innovation-driven businesses. Banks do not tend to consider such investments. In their first few years, there may not be sufficient customer revenue to fund growth, so this is where early stage venture capital is required—to boost those with most potential. Although Australia has 113 early stage venture capital limited partnership funds, none was established in Western Australia prior to 2023. The Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation opened its WA venture support pilot program in 2022, funded from the new industries fund.

WAVES has offered to provide \$100 000 for three years for up to three new early stage venture funds that would either set up in WA or put an employee on the ground in WA for the first time. After a competitive process, three newly established WA-based early stage venture funds were chosen for the funding—Purpose Ventures, FundWA and Quokka Capital. In early 2023, Purpose Ventures closed its first fund, raising \$37 million from WA investors. This fund is already screening WA-based deals and proposes to spend the majority of its fund in WA-based startups and early stage innovators. Purpose Ventures became the first early stage venture capital limited partnership to be established in WA. In April 2023, Quokka Capital became the second in WA, having been awarded provisional status. It is now raising its first fund and, like Purpose Ventures, will look to invest the majority of its funds in WA-based businesses. Meanwhile, FundWA has established itself as a managed investment scheme, aiming to raise \$50 million. Once these three funds are up and running, they aim to deploy the majority of their collective \$100 million of funds to invest in Western Australian startups. As members can see, the McGowan government is intent on driving venture capital investment to ensure a valuable, viable and sustainable local innovation sector well into the future.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 35: Communities — Services 1 to 6, Volunteering, \$1 154 930 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms H.M. Beazley, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Volunteering.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Ms C. Irwin, Assistant Director General.

Mr C. Stewart, Director, Strategic Policy.

Mr W. Millen, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr O. Pincott, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mr J. Stokes, Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for North West Central.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to “Volunteering WA Digital Platform” under the election commitments at the bottom of page 521 of budget paper No 2. Can the parliamentary secretary outline what that platform provides?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The government has committed \$175 000 over 2021–22 to 2024–25 and \$15 000 recurrent funding for Volunteering WA to develop a statewide digital platform to support the coordination of emergency volunteering. Initial funding of \$100 000 was provided in 2021–22. A \$30 000 grant was provided in 2022–23 to fund a business case to cost and explore the net cost benefit of improvements to volunteer databases operated by Volunteering WA. As I mentioned, the government is providing annual funding of \$15 000 per annum from 2023–24 onwards to support a statewide platform for emergency volunteering knowledge. As the peak body for volunteering in Western Australia, VWA’s mission is to lead, advance and celebrate volunteering in WA. Its vision is for every Western Australian to enjoy volunteering experiences that enrich our state. VWA hosts the national technology platforms for volunteer recruitment and management and several events that celebrate and recognise the essential role our volunteers play, including annual WA Volunteer of the Year Awards. Volunteering WA has a proven track record of working collaboratively with partners to enhance the volunteering sector in WA for the benefit of all Western Australians. VWA provides leadership and support to volunteers, involving organisations throughout the state, and it works to connect volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations with corporate bodies and online volunteer programs and training.

Ms M. BEARD: Are some of the costs for the overall management of that platform or are the funds going to an external group for someone else to do that?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The grant goes to Volunteering WA and then it commissions technology providers to carry out the work.

Ms M. BEARD: My next question relates to volunteering grants on the next page, 522. The actual budget is \$189 000 in 2020–21, and it seems to be \$30 000 in this budget and the out years. Can the parliamentary secretary explain the reason behind the cuts?

[5.50 pm]

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I revert to the director general.

Mr M. Rowe: Thank you very much for the question. In fact, that figure of \$189 000 in the previous financial year includes the ongoing \$30 000 contribution each year for the Thank a Volunteer Day grants program. On top of that, it also includes a number of other grant items that were expended in the 2021–22 financial year. That consists of a one-off payment of \$115 000 to Volunteering WA to promote volunteering and \$45 000 to WA Police Force for a screening subsidy. That subsidy reduces the cost for volunteers to undertake the necessary screening so that they can go about and get their police clearance as required. Volunteers in Western Australia are subsidised through the WA Police Force, and a grant goes to it for that purpose.

Ms M. BEARD: Noting that priority action 1.1 in the *Western Australian volunteering strategy action plan 2023–2026* is to “Provide funding to peak volunteering body to advance volunteering initiatives in WA”, is there other funding somewhere in the budget that will go towards that?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The short answer is yes, but for more detail, I will divert the question to the director general.

Mr M. Rowe: Not all the funding that is available through the volunteering portfolio was shown in the administered grants and subsidies line items. The total is \$1.408 million, of which quite a significant portion goes to Volunteering WA as the peak volunteering organisation for Western Australia. In 2023–24, the government will provide \$562 000 to the volunteering centre to operate as the peak body for volunteering. Under the sector support, development and advocacy program, the Department of Communities provides a variety of funding to various peak bodies in Western Australia, and obviously Volunteering WA is the peak body for volunteering. A key focus for 2023–24 is to increase volunteer numbers through a collaborative approach with Volunteering WA; that is obviously about building resilience in the sector to ensure that volunteer numbers continue to rise and volunteering services are responsive to changing community needs.

Ms M. BEARD: I note that Volunteering WA calculated the volunteer contribution as being \$39 billion worth of value to WA. Can the parliamentary secretary outline the number of volunteers in Western Australia?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I am just gathering that information for the member. An estimated 80 per cent of Western Australians aged 15 years and over donate about 15.9 hours a month to the community. Their contribution equates to more than 315 million hours each year. The investment returns a person wellbeing benefit of \$9.9 billion annually. Volunteering is WA’s largest industry based on participation that delivers high returns to the community. The social, economic and cultural value of volunteering has been estimated at about \$39 billion of value annually. Every dollar invested in WA’s 5 000 volunteer-involved organisations returns \$4.50 in benefits to the community. In percentage terms, an estimated 80 per cent of Western Australia aged 15 years or over volunteer.

Ms M. BEARD: Are those volunteers in the numbers that the parliamentary secretary provided all registered through Volunteering WA?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Not every volunteer is registered through Volunteering WA. Please understand volunteers include P&C volunteers.

Ms M. BEARD: I wonder how the department collates that information and how those numbers are gathered.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: It is estimated.

Ms M. BEARD: Has the parliamentary secretary noticed a declining trend or has there been a change from last year’s number of volunteers?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: As I expect the member would presume, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, an estimated 64.2 per cent of Western Australian volunteers were stood down to comply with public health directives. However, an Australian National University report noted that, 12 months on, WA was the only state or territory to not experience a significant decline in overall participation.

Ms M. BEARD: What strategies does the department have in place to target and try to bolster the volunteer numbers? Is there some kind of particular targeted strategy in place through Volunteering WA?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Amongst other things, and to relate it back to the budget, one major strategy is the WA volunteering media campaign. The Department of Communities in collaboration with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet has developed collateral for a volunteer media campaign, including videos for YouTube and associated social media, radio advertisements, static digital content to be utilised from March to June 2023—right now. Creative content has been produced with the participation of volunteers representing Western Australian community groups, including Teach Learn Grow, WA Museum Boola Bardip, WA Maritime Museum and UWA Guild Volunteering in collaboration with the Perth Homeless Support Group. I can add to that if the member wishes. Other initiatives that recognise volunteering and, therefore, encourage participation are the WA Volunteer Service Awards, and we also host events around National Volunteer Week and International Volunteer Day that all add to the recruitment and celebration of volunteers.

Ms M. BEARD: This question relates to “Volunteering WA Digital Platform” on page 521. Are the St John Ambulance volunteers included in the numbers?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Is the member asking whether St John Ambulance volunteers are included in the estimated 80 per cent of people aged 15 years and over who volunteer?

Ms M. BEARD: Yes.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes.

Ms M. BEARD: Has there been any request to evaluate the base of volunteers and engage with them to see what the risk might be if St John Ambulance was privatised or that group of necessary volunteers, for want of a better word, were to become non-volunteers?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I am unclear how this relates to the budget papers.

Ms M. BEARD: I am asking has the department extracted from the digital platform any information on the numbers to which the parliamentary secretary referred, to identify the value for St John Ambulance volunteers versus all others in the system?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Not that we are aware of, no.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 5.58 to 7.00 pm

Division 36: Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries — Service 2, Local Government, \$19 192 000 —

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr J.N. Carey, Minister for Local Government.

Ms L. Chopping, Director General.

Ms E. Gauntlett, Deputy Director General, Management and Coordination.

Mr L. Carren, Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Mr T. Fraser, Executive Director, Local Government.

Ms L. Kalasopatan, Executive Director, Finance.

Mr E. Redshaw, Director, Regulatory Reform.

Ms C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Local Government.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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I give the call to the member for North West Central.

Ms M. BEARD: Thank you, chair. Good evening, everyone. Minister, I refer to page 542 and paragraph 11, venue management services.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Sorry, member. That does not relate to my portfolio.

Ms M. BEARD: Oh!

Mr J.N. CAREY: That is okay; we all do it.

Ms M. BEARD: That is okay.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Do not worry; I have done it.

Ms M. BEARD: My question is about one in particular, the Bunbury Regional Entertainment Centre —

Mr J.N. CAREY: Unfortunately, I cannot answer that. It is okay; I have done it.

Ms M. BEARD: No; it is all good.

The CHAIR: For your guidance, member, it is service 2, local government. You can see the different services. Venue management is service 11.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 547 and the cost of services for grants and subsidies. Have any local government authorities applied for the urban greening grant facilitated by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I am really sorry again, member. That program is not under my portfolio.

Ms M. BEARD: Oh my gosh, sorry.

Mr J.N. CAREY: No, you are a new member. I have been a new member. I have done this before.

Ms M. BEARD: Thank you for being understanding.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I know we have goes at each other on a range of issues, but we were all new.

Ms M. BEARD: Thank you for that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: On page 537, I refer to the regulation and support of local government. I am looking at the budget for full-time equivalent employees. Given the likely changes to the Local Government Act, is there an expectation that the number of employees will rise in the future from the level of 65 quoted in the budget documents?

Mr J.N. CAREY: That is a good and reasonable question, member. The first tranche of reforms that we have now passed is not a substantial imposition on the agency for the reason that it related heavily to electoral reform and also a range of other reforms that were really about transparency and accountability for local governments. The member is right to say that the second tranche will create the role of a local government inspector. We are still working on it in significant detail with the Western Australian Local Government Association and Local Government Professionals because it is very complex. It will create monitors, noting that the monitors will not be staff employees but, in fact, experts who could be former mayors and CEOs. Yes, I suspect there will be an increase in resourcing around the local government inspector role and their capacity, but those decisions will be finalised as the legislation passes—God willing!—and then will be considered as part of that budget process.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Does the minister expect the commencement of any of these processes in this current budget year?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Member, again, it is a reasonable question to ask. As the member would be aware, it will be based on the timing of the passage of the legislation. I am sincere and I think the member had this feedback from the local government sector. The local government inspector is a hugely complex issue because it will also deal with penalties and how we deal with investigations to make them more effective. I think we all agree in this room that we do not want to see perpetual inquiries or investigations that go on forever. I am taking my time to get this right with WALGA and LGPro. I want to get the legislation in. I understand the need for it, but I do not want to second-guess, ultimately, how long it will take to get through Parliament.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 531 and the Dog Amendment (Stop Puppy Farming) Act 2021. When will the regulations enabling changes to the Dog Act be implemented? Maybe I should not call it the Dog Act! Should I maybe call it the stop puppy farming act?

The CHAIR: It has been called the Dog Act for many years, member for Roe.

Mr J.N. CAREY: The question the member asked relates primarily to the establishment of a central registration system. It is all focused on that and I think the member is aware of that because he asked questions about it. That is the biggest, most complex piece. When we passed the laws, obviously for any dog lover with greyhounds, the muzzle went like that! I was at a citizenship ceremony on the weekend and a woman came up to me to say, “Thank you so much, John.” There was bipartisan support across the chamber for that act.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I know that the member for Forrestfield was very happy about it.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Yes, he is a big greyhound lover. They are beautiful dogs.

We have gone through the tender process now. We are doing the evaluation of the tender process, but the rest of the reforms rely on a central registration system. It is far more complex than members can imagine because what we are effectively doing is creating one system for all local governments. We are working through that assessment. Obviously, once the preferred supplier is determined, we will then start work on creating the system. There will need to be some ongoing communication and engagement with local government. We want to make sure we get that registration system right. We have aspirations for next year. I cannot give a clearer time frame for that because I do not want to pre-empt the length of time it will take to create the new registration system. It all hinges on the register.

[7.10 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The first part of the question is about the fact that our dog rangers are fairly frustrated at the moment. I understand that a lot of dog rangers are frustrated by the implementation of the centralised system. Is there some sort of interim arrangement or, once in place, the centralised system is the only time they can enforce things under the legislation?

Mr J.N. CAREY: As the member would be aware, and I say this respectfully and I think he knows this, a number of local governments take enforcement of existing dog legislation very seriously. For example, in my own electorate, the City of Vincent does so very much. We need the central registration system. That is the critical part. That is a huge reform. We will continue to engage with local governments, but they have existing powers. We are aiming for the registration system to be in place next year.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: When it is finally put in place, what does the minister estimate the cost will be, firstly to the taxpayer?

Mr J.N. CAREY: There will obviously be registration fees et cetera. They will be set by regulation. Local government costs will include registration, administration and rangers, noting that they already have to do that. I understand the angle the member is coming from, although I have to admit that out of all the things we have had to reform, there has been a lot more pushback on preferential voting versus the central dog register. Local governments

already bear many of these costs. When you think about it, they have to administer registration right now and they have to run rangers. The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries will have the licensing system. We will set the fees by regulation. I might ask the director general whether she wishes to add anything.

Ms L. Chopping: The only thing I will add is that on page 545 of budget paper No 2 is a line item under the asset investment program that gives the capital cost for the coming year of \$2.586 million for the delivery of the centralised registration system. That is the delivery cost to get the system up and running. The minister has outlined that there will be a cost recovery process, which was originally canvassed in the first part of consultation, and there will be further discussion about that in the rollout of the CRS.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I just add something about the consultation so I can put it on the record. In-depth engagement with local governments commenced in the second half of 2022. This focused on the scoping requirements of the central registration system so it was fit for purpose. Twenty-six local governments were engaged, with the remainder having input via surveys, questionnaires and discussions. There is ongoing engagement with other stakeholders. Substantial work is being done to make sure that local government understands the final CRS that will come into place tries to address the concerns that the member has had. I understand that any change can bring some concerns and worries. I think the member can agree, whether or not he agrees with other elements, that one central cat and dog registration system will be better able to police such things as when people move, because, as the member knows, people move and forget to register their animals. A central register is key.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I hear what the minister is saying about the centralised system, which I think has some good elements. As the member knows, from consideration in detail and our second reading contributions, the likes of Wagin shire council are very worried about the fact that costs keep getting loaded back onto individual local governments. I am trying pinpoint how much a local shire would be up for per registered dog. Does the minister have any estimate of that?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I want to assure the member that my agency and I will continue to engage with local governments. I always have an open-door policy when people want to flag concerns. There is one critical saving. Currently, 139 local governments administer their own registration process. There will still be rangers, everyone will have rangers, but there will be a cost saving to local governments because they will not need to hold a central register anymore, whether it is digital or manual, however they do that. As the member knows, smaller local governments—things can change—may not do it digitally. This will mean one digital register that is run and costed by my agency. The fees will be set by regulation. My commitment on the record is that we will continue to consult with local governments. There is likely to be cost recovery.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 537 of budget paper No 2 and the total cost of service for the regulation and support of local government. Could the minister outline what support services the department provides to local government authorities?

Mr J.N. CAREY: That is a very reasonable question. I think I have been on the record as saying that my strong preference is early intervention. Under the new director general of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, we have seen a very heavy push to early intervention. I do not want to see local government inquiries. We all agree they cause enormous stress on ratepayers, chief officers and councillors for whatever reason. From time to time, though, we need to call inquiries. The whole reform program we are introducing is about early intervention; that is a critical piece. In our current agency there has been a strong focus on working with local governments. Our local government team has been going to local councils to have discussions about particular challenges or issues they have been facing, so it has been far more proactive. The member may have also seen correspondence sent to certain local governments indicating to a CEO or a mayor that we see some issues and trends and would like them to try work on them early, rather than allowing the problems to persist. I might ask the director general whether she wants to add anything further.

[7.20 pm]

Ms L. Chopping: Thank you, minister. In a nutshell, the services provided to the sector include support and advice. Obviously, a whole range of web content is available for local governments, elected members and the executive. We have a helpline available to provide resourcing, support and education. Importantly, we have an accounting help desk, which is really important for providing advice to the accounting divisions within local governments, particularly small local governments that may sometimes struggle to have the capacity to meet their financial reporting obligations, or just help on a day-to-day basis. We develop policies and guidelines around the regulatory framework, which gives the sector an idea of what is appropriate and not appropriate in certain circumstances.

The minister talked about our compliance and enforcement. Our regulatory role, which is very much at the moment about support and engagement, is to try to ensure compliance, because we all share that as our aspiration for local government. We also have an investigations and enforcement area that looks at issues of conduct and other practices. Importantly, we have a role in advising the minister on a whole range of legislation that is relevant to local government. That is not only the Local Government Act, but also the Dog Act, the Cat Act and a whole range of other legislation.

Ms M. BEARD: In that section, under regulation and support of local government, there is the net cost of services. Can the minister explain the variance in those figures?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I am sorry, member; just so I make sure I am answering the right question, which part is it?

Ms M. BEARD: It is \$19 004 000, and the estimated actual is \$11 609 000.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Is the member referring to the net cost of service of \$19 million for 2020–21, and then in 2022–23 it is at \$12.191 million?

Ms M. BEARD: Yes, that is the budget cost.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Primarily, it relates to election commitments. As the member would be aware, every portfolio has a number of election commitments. These are smaller or local election commitments that were made. As a result, we see a reduction in that gap. I will ask the director general whether she wants to add any further information.

Ms L. Chopping: The larger amount for the 2021–22 actual is made up predominantly because of the delivery of election commitments. We can obviously elaborate on the detail of the election commitments if that is required. The drop to \$12 million is the usual funding. It is \$16.8 million in 2023–24 predominantly because of the roll forward of the funding for the delivery of the regulatory reforms. We have some specified funding around regulatory reform work that we are doing, and also the final delivery of the puppy farming reforms that we talked about before.

Ms M. BEARD: The line item “Employees (Full-Time Equivalents)” shows 57 FTE varying through to 65. Does the department have any vacancies at the moment with those employees?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I will ask the director general to answer that question.

Ms L. Chopping: The 2021–22 actual FTE reflects the number of vacancies that we experienced due to difficulties in labour market conditions, but the variance is not significant. There is a growth of two FTE over the year, which is for the Indian Ocean territories, so there is an additional position there, and also for the implementation of the puppy farming reform work. As we indicated earlier, the budgeted FTE for the local government portfolio is not expected to grow significantly in 2023–24. As at 31 March—these are the latest figures that we had in preparation for this hearing—there were five vacancies within the local government portfolio, and all positions are in the process of being recruited. It should be noted that vacancies will vary any day of the week; obviously, things change over time.

At a broader level for the department, we have experienced some really significant improvements in our attraction and retention of staff overall, and I can make some comments on that if the member would like.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 547 and the heading “Income from Government”. With the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act —

Mr J.N. CAREY: I am really sorry, member; that is definitely not me. Anything on page 547 is definitely not me.

Ms M. BEARD: My question was whether the government will be providing additional funding to the department to help manage any requirements that the local government, the department or the councils will have to comply with as a result of an influx of work when those changes come in?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Sorry, member; I am just seeking advice. My apologies.

Ms M. BEARD: I have confused the minister. When the changes come in under the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act, obviously, lots larger than 1 100 square metres will be affected. I expect that ratepayers will be approaching LGAs for help with that or for information. Will the government provide either the department or some of the local governments with additional income to manage the influx they might receive in relation to that?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Member, respectfully, that is not within my portfolio.

Ms M. BEARD: That is fine.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I understand the member is asking a question that intersects with local government, but it is not a program that I administer. The member could try to ask that question on notice to the relevant minister.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I would like some advice. The director general mentioned the Indian Ocean territories a minute ago. On page 529, there is a spending change of \$63 000 a year, and it comes under the line item “Indian Ocean Territories”. I do not know whether that is related to the work done by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries; regardless, could the minister explain the support that the department provides to the territories, how that is structured and whether the costs are refunded from the federal government?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Sorry, member; some of that is not in my portfolio. Is the member referring to page 529 and “Indian Ocean Territories”?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I think that falls within the culture and the arts portfolio. I am trying to find the member another reference. I am sorry about this.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think the other reference was in the previous answer on some of the cost and employment changes. The director general said that it was to do with support for the territories. Perhaps the minister could outline what support the department offers.

Mr J.N. CAREY: In effect, I am advised it is exactly the same kind of support that we would provide as part of our local government regulatory and support service functions. I will ask the director general to add some further comment.

[7.30 pm]

Ms L. Chopping: Indeed, we provide a suite of services to the Indian Ocean territories across all the different portfolios that we work with. In particular, in relation to local government, we provide the services that I indicated earlier. Local governments get the full hotline service, so we are available on the phone. We travel there once a year to do onsite education and support, and our investigations and assessments unit undertakes investigations, should they be warranted, in the same way that we do with all other local governments. Obviously, we provide culture and arts support and a whole range of other support in other portfolios, but specifically in relation to local government, that is the nature of the support. We have recently been to both the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Christmas Island for those compliance support visits. I do not believe there are any issues that we have detected. We are working well with them on their functions up there.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to page 535 and the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators. Perhaps this goes to engaging with local governments, which the minister was talking about before. One of the outcomes is that local governments are supported to meet the legislative requirements of the Local Government Act, and the actual percentage of local governments with which actions were taken in support of compliance with the legislative framework was 31 per cent in 2021–22, the budgeted percentage was 20 per cent in 2022–23, the estimated actual percentage in the current year is 36 per cent and the budgeted target is 35 per cent. Given that the budgeted level of engagement has increased from 20 per cent to 35 per cent, I seek some explanation of that and whether the department is being proactive or whether there has been a rash of problems.

The CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, is note 3 also relevant to your question?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think note 3 is relevant, but I want some confirmation and an explanation of how that is playing out.

Mr J.N. CAREY: The member is spot-on. As the director general and I have discussed, it is about a far more proactive and early intervention approach with local governments. However, I want to flag that that early intervention and proactive approach should not be viewed as punitive. It is not the case that every time a local government identifies issues or is requested to participate, it is a punitive measure. I think there is general agreement that more local governments are saying that they need assistance on matters. I might ask the executive director of local government, who has been doing this early intervention, to give some greater insight.

Mr T. Fraser: As the minister indicated, the department has taken an early intervention approach in working with a number of councils. That can be on a range of different measures. It can certainly be just assisting them with setting up their governance structures, understanding how they work functionally as a council and understanding the various roles and relationships. I will highlight a couple of more specific things, particularly the financial reporting area. In both the regions and the metropolitan area, we have established a dedicated financial reporting area, and the introduction of streamlined financial reporting has also assisted. There has been a lot of work through things like better practice reviews with some local governments, as well as just more generally trying to be more proactive, as the minister mentioned, through direct engagement on those broader governance issues that some of our councils face. The figures that the member sees there reflect the early intervention and us trying to provide that support and assistance.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the streamlining of financial reporting and the engagement mainly being done with smaller local governments that may have some changes to the level of reporting that they need to do or is it across the board?

Mr J.N. CAREY: We have worked heavily with the local government sector on looking at model financial templates and the way that we undertake financial reporting. As a consequence, we have just introduced new templates, which will reduce the overall burden for all local governments, but also, in particular, as the member has identified, reduce the burden on tier 3 and tier 4 local governments. It is a tiered approach. As we know, we have four tiers of local governments. It is about trying to streamline and reduce the burden for smaller local governments. That is what we have done in the Local Government Act, but no-one really cared. For example, live streaming is required for local governments in tiers 1 and 2, but only recording is required for those in tiers 3 and 4. Again, no-one really got excited about council plans, but this means that a big council can do a hoity-toity \$200 000 glossy plan, as the City of Stirling has done—we love its work—while a small local government in tier 4 can just do a black-and-white council plan that it has to review after eight years. We have really tried to change that approach. Of course, the issue that the member worked on with me, and I think we had a bipartisan approach, was about implementing the streamlining for general practitioner procurement if a local government had an existing GP.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank you for that advice.

In terms of support for local government, we know that there is a move across government towards establishing some climate change action, and we can look at what Treasury and other government departments are doing. Is the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries involved in any way in encouraging or enabling some change in line with the government's broader climate action agenda?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Obviously, we recently made changes to the Local Government Act, and one of the principles was to give consideration to climate change as an ongoing issue. I think that there are both large and small local governments that are doing incredible stuff on climate change and they do not need a principle in the act to already be out there doing that work. There is a collaboration with my agency that is predominantly driven by environmental agencies on the regional climate alliance program. That program supports regional local governments coming together in collective partnerships to help tackle climate change. I understand that it is not administered by my agency; it is done by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation. Around \$200 000 and in-kind support is given to the program. My agency is a member of the coordinating group. We are not the lead on that. The South Coast Alliance includes four councils, and the Goldfields Voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils includes nine councils, but my understanding is that they have been voluntary collaborations of those local governments. I might ask the director general whether she wants to add anything further.

[7.40 pm]

Ms L. Chopping: More broadly across the department and across all its portfolios, I sit on the portfolio oversight group of directors general responsible for climate action policy, planning and programs across our portfolios. For example, in this budget we have secured \$500 000 to audit all our cultural camp assets, one of which is in Albany, to look at climate adaptation. We do some work in that space from a leadership point of view.

In addition, we work with Waterwise. I am not sure whether the minister mentioned that and whether I am repeating him, but we do a lot of work in water and water efficiency.

In our infrastructure area, which crosses over with the sport and recreation, culture and arts, and multicultural interests portfolios, we do a lot of work in green planning, infrastructure, water utilisation, energy efficiency et cetera.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The director general mentioned \$500 000 in grants. Is that the \$500 000 on page 551, under cash flows from government for the climate action fund special purpose account in 2023–24, or is that money that has already been expended?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I will give a little bit of leeway. It is not in my portfolio but, yes, they have received a grant.

Mr R.S. LOVE: On page 549 in the table “Details of controlled grants and subsidies” is an actual spend in 2021–22 for the off-road vehicles fund. It seems to be the only spend in the budget documents for the off-road vehicles fund. Can the minister explain a little bit about the fund? I understand it is collected by the Department of Transport on behalf of the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, and it is used to assist local governments with the development and maintenance of off-road vehicle areas, but there does not seem to be anything flowing out of it. Perhaps the minister could explain what is happening there.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Grants have been given out in the past few years for off-road vehicles. Our key focus at the moment is working to identify new sites, and this is the broader picture and the challenge. We both know that there is a very strong advocacy group, and I respect the work it does, but the key focus for us is looking at identifying potential new areas for ORVs that would, obviously, then be funded by the account and the fund, and the agency is working on this. That seems easy, and I respect the work of the passionate advocates, but it is actually much harder than people think. We have reached out to particular local governments and have been doing assessments of sites, but a range of factors are at play. Land conflicts, whether local governments are interested in having them, conflicts with residents and environmental concerns are all factors at play. I want to assure the member and put on the record that my agency and I are very focused on trying to identify and establish new ORV areas for this growing and popular sport.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Would it be possible for the minister to provide, perhaps by supplementary information, a list of the grants that have been given in the last four or five years?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I will read them all out now. In 2019–20, there was \$9 000 to develop a beginners track trail at Pinjar ORV area in the City of Wanneroo. In 2020–21, \$40 000 was given to upgrade the York off-road vehicle area, and I attended that announcement. Undertaking a preliminary site assessment of the land in East Keralup in the City of Rockingham was \$28 957. In 2021–22, \$30 263 was for improved signage and road access at the Lancelin ORV area. There was \$43 837 to develop a concept plan for a potential ORV area on the Metro Road in the Shire of Brookton. There was \$50 000 for maintenance and upgrades to the trails at Pinjar ORV area and \$4 010 to complete a stage 2 report on the potential ORV site in East Keralup. We have also used it to facilitate scoping and costing for the DoT Direct upgrades to prepare for online registration of ORVs. As the member knows, this is substantial work. That stage of this project is around \$60 000. There was \$66 135 from the ORV account to facilitate upgrades by the Shire of Gingin for improvements to the Ledge Point ORV area. In 2022–23, \$23 404 was approved from the ORV account to undertake a desktop land-use planning assessment for informing the prioritising, as I have discussed, of potential sites and supporting the ORV committee's planning and implementation of the site development.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I thank the minister very much for the support for Ledge Point, for a start. I think that has been a good initiative.

The minister would know that there is controversy in the community about the future of the Lancelin ORV site. Has there been any support to find alternatives or negotiate a way through the situation with the Lancelin ORV area in the medium term?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Obviously, as the member knows, broader issues have been across other portfolios, and I understand Minister Cook had a relevant meeting on the matter. First of all, the advice is that we are looking at potential further funding support for safety upgrades of the Lancelin ORV area. I understand the concerns, and I want to put it on the record that all the advice I have received is that the interaction between the Lancelin ORV area and any potential mining exploration will be on the far horizon if it does occur. I always understand that there are community concerns, but I think there is likely potential for additional funding for safety upgrades.

Is the member laughing at that pen?

Mr R.S. LOVE: No, we have the same pen. I nearly stole his pen!

Mr J.N. CAREY: I thought that I had really bored the member. I could not see his face, but I could see the pen movement and both members looking at the pen.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I appreciate the minister's answer. He knows that there is a lot of concern from the users of the area and from the farming people who rely on the lime sand. The minister appreciates that it is a difficult situation for everybody involved. I thank him for his answer.

The appropriation was recommended.

[7.50 pm]

Division 35: Communities — Services 7 to 9, Housing; Homelessness, \$1 364 871 000 —

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr J.N. Carey, Minister for Housing; Homelessness.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Mr W. Millen, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms M. Samuels, Deputy Director General.

Mr L. McIvor, Deputy Director General.

Ms E. Colombera, Executive Director, Office of Homelessness.

Ms C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Local Government.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: First, I welcome everyone here. I want to put on the record my thanks to the minister and his chief of staff for helping us out on a couple of occasions with various housing issues in my electorate. It is much appreciated.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Sorry—I just fell off my chair in surprise! I'll take it! I'll take it! I am ready, so thank you. The member has made my night.

The CHAIR: Hansard will note that it is 7.55 pm on a Thursday night of the estimates committee! The member for Roe with a question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 514 and rental housing. Paragraph 7 refers to the total cost of the provision of housing to eligible Western Australians. What is the policy around the replacement of essential housing for key workers in regional WA?

Mr J.N. CAREY: This is just a broader Government Regional Officers' Housing question; is that correct?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I want to put this on the record because I think it is important. First, given that we are starting off well with each other, member, and I appreciate that—I understand that it will get tougher soon—I note that the former Leader of the Nationals WA, Mia Davies, the member for Roe and a number of National MPs welcomed the increase in GROH expenditure. I want to put on the record that it is an additional \$61.6 million investment, so the total investment over the next four years is \$234 million. That is for new builds, spot purchases, refurbishment, leasing and maintenance. I will ask the deputy director general of the housing and assets division to go further into this. A number of factors are at play in how GROH is done. Obviously, we look at demand from agencies. We look at existing stock. We look at what existing stock is suitable to meet the needs and whether we refurbish that stock or, alternatively, whether we decide to build new stock. Of course, there are other market constraints. I am on the record about other particular markets. With GROH stock in general, I remember the opposition talking about surplus GROH stock. I am aggressively looking at every opportunity. Where it is surplus to needs and does not meet the basic conditions of GROH, we can repurpose for social housing. There are a number of considerations when we are looking at GROH stock. I will ask the deputy director general to comment further.

Mr L. McIvor: There are currently 5 118 houses in the GROH portfolio. That is spread across ownership, but we also lease those from the private market. We have forecast this year that we will have added 80 dwellings to our owned portfolio this year. As the minister mentioned, there is \$234 million in the forward years and \$134 million of that is aimed at investment and growing our ownership through construction and spot purchasing. Thirty-four homes are in design or construction at present around Western Australia for the GROH portfolio. Although we look very closely at that portfolio as far as disposals go, one of the options in some towns is to convert a house to social housing, which has been very helpful for us if client agencies no longer have a need for that home. We also work closely with local governments and developers to seek their submissions when we may underwrite a development by taking on a 10-year lease of apartments. Some of those are in the early stages now, but there are some positive signals that the government can be a key tenant in those residential apartments and the government can take a substantial piece. We may sign a lease, or sign up to a 10-year lease, and that will help the developer finish its finance and commence construction.

[8.00 pm]

Mr J.N. CAREY: I will just add to that. As the member knows, it is a mix, so we lease, we spot purchase and we build, but it is dependent on market forces. We actively encourage local governments to put forward proposals, as the director general said, to facilitate key worker accommodation and GROH. They may come to me as the Minister for Lands and also seek land as part of that proposal.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question, though this is probably asked with my local member hat on. We have had an example, which I was only enlightened to today, of exactly what the minister was talking about. In the town of Munglinup, which had a healthy 1.6 per cent increase in the census, the community and GROH were working towards a new house to attract a quality principal. In the last few days, they received a letter informing them that the situation had been reviewed and it was looking at improving the current house's level of amenity with some interim flooring. The community is very unhappy. I wanted to take this opportunity to mention this. The minister referred to having the right house for the right place. In this instance, the whole community was driving towards the project with the assistance of GROH, and now they seem to have had the rug pulled out from under them.

The CHAIR: Before I give the minister the call, I just say that I appreciate the reason the member is raising that issue. I think there is plenty of goodwill, so I will give the call to the minister. I want to put on the record again that as we descend into questions of detail, particular circumstances and policy questions that are not budget specific, it gets harder for me to rule them in order. I do not want to set a precedent but I think there is goodwill here and I ask the minister to provide a response.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I appreciate that.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I thank the member for his question. I understand the complexities. I will be frank: everyone wants a new house everywhere we go. I understand that. There are GROH standards. As we heard from the director general, we are seeking to manage 5 000 properties at any one time. Given the constraints we face given the current construction market and so forth, assessments will be made. If a house meets certain GROH standards—I do not know the individual circumstances; I am talking more broadly—an assessment is done, it still meets that standard but we might make minor improvements or refurbishments to improve the overall quality, and that GROH house will be retained in the system.

The reason we do that is because trying to build a new house, as the member would be aware, particularly in some regional communities, is bloody tough. We may have a staff member coming that we need to get into a house. At other times, we look at a GROH house, it is well below standard but we can refurbish it to become social housing or we may see whether the local government needs potential housing, and if we do not need it for social housing,

we consider other options. I assure the member that we are trying to use every viable housing stock that we have—any which may. You name it; I am like the man with the kitchen knives! Is it GROH, is it social, could it be used for a not-for-profit or could it be used for community housing? We are doing everything we can to try to utilise that site. I understand that people always want new, but it is simply not always possible in this market.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thank the minister; I appreciate his response. Does the minister take into account the potential of the community and local government helping out to potentially make a new house happen easier and more efficiently?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Yes. There is a “call for submissions” process already in play when local governments can come forward with proposals to construct houses themselves or build a GROH house and then we provide, as we have said, a 10-year lease. That provides the house but it also gives a financial income stream to the local government. It was done under the previous government and it is done under our government. It is a viable mechanism. I will give an example. Some local governments may say, “We will build these houses; we will take part of it as GROH because that gives us the surety of income, but we might use other stock in a group dwelling for local government workers or for retail workers.” We are open to local governments coming forward with creative ideas, but of course we also have to consider the demand and look at the existing stock because obviously we have competing demands across all regional communities.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: At a community level, can the minister appreciate a community’s desire to have a good quality principal and good quality staff at their school and the like? I think the minister and I both agree that quality housing is part of that scenario.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I appreciate that. I am an inner-city slicker. I understand all three members opposite are regional MPs. My mum grew up in Perenjori and was the daughter of farmers. Even then, she talked about the importance of retaining good staff and attracting people. As the member would be aware, we are seeing that with local governments. I notice that the local government of Manjimup has been heavily criticised for creating incentives. Ultimately, if that is the way to get a chief executive to a community, so be it. I appreciate it. As minister, I have 5 000 properties with a constrained market and we have a GROH standard. I understand. I am sure that if I did a poll, every local government and every GROH tenant would want a completely new house. I just cannot do it in that market, but there are GROH standards that are prescribed. I suggest that local government is probably too late for this principal but through the “call for submissions” process, that local government could reach out to my agency. My agency is very proactive and I am sure it could give advice about the best way to approach that.

Ms L. METTAM: I thank the minister, and I thank the minister for his support for people in my electorate as well.

Mr J.N. CAREY: And?

Ms L. METTAM: I have a very simple question. I refer to the first significant issue impacting the agency, which relates to the government’s investment to improve housing stock, on page 503 of budget paper No 2. I also refer to the Premier’s comments in the estimates committee hearing on Tuesday that the reason the government sold so many social houses in the first term of government was —

... they were dysfunctional and crime ridden, and residents were using huge amounts of drugs and other things. They were ghettos.

Does the minister agree with the Premier’s comments that the social housing homes that were sold in the first term of government were all inhabited by drug addicts and other things and resembled ghettos?

The CHAIR: I just want to be clear, member for Vasse, that estimates is not an opportunity to ask ministers about other ministers’ comments. I will indulge it if the minister is willing to indulge it, but that is not technically in order.

Ms L. METTAM: He is up to it!

[8.10 pm]

Mr J.N. CAREY: I appreciate that the member has raised this issue because I want to take the opportunity to go into detail about Brownlie Towers. I read the Premier’s comments and I saw the full context of them. I want to explain the history of Brownlie Towers. I think a lot of people would be surprised or shocked because the history of Brownlie Towers has been easily forgotten, but there were successive significant issues with Brownlie Towers. I want to put this on the record. I am not trying to have a crack, but it might shock everyone here—I was shocked on review—that by 2016, over 160 of the 300 units were vacant or could not be lived in. There were significant plumbing issues. The cost came in at \$15 million. This issue has been in multiple press articles. I have been on the public record to say that we are shifting away from enclaves. Absolutely. I have used the words “ghetto” and “enclave”. We are shifting away from that and we are moving to an integrated approach of social housing across suburbs.

I want to quote a former resident regarding Brownlie Towers. This is from an ABC article published in 2019 —

It was not the place I would have ever wanted to bring a child up.

“It was too violent, there was fights constantly—as a kid you’d be frightened at getting your nose bloodied.

“There were murders, there were suicides, there were cars being set on fire in the car park, police turning up in their vans and breaking up parties, violently.

It wasn’t the happy suburban lifestyle for anyone I don’t think.”

Another resident is quoted in a 2019 Daily Mail Australia article as saying —

‘Drugs were everywhere, cars were always broken into and my neighbour threatened to kill me. I barricaded myself in my flat every night.

‘They put us in there like cattle without looking at people’s circumstances and what would happen if they put them all ... together.’

They are not a politician’s words; they are the words of residents who were in that building and have personal experience. We are facing this broader and bigger picture. It is really important to put this on the record, and I am very passionate about it. We have this incredible system with ageing stock. A huge number of the stock is over 31 years old. We have inherited this ageing stock, including Brownlie Towers. No disrespect to the seven former Liberal and Nationals WA housing ministers who discussed and talked about the problems at Brownlie Towers, but it was ultimately our government that made that very difficult decision to close that tower down. It was the right decision, but it was difficult for this reason: as soon as we did that, we knew we would lose 300 houses from the system. When we made that decision to close down that major enclave with a history of significant social issues, as I have described and quoted, it had a dramatic impact. We had to do that at not only Brownlie Towers, but also Stirling Towers in my electorate, which also faced similar reports and issues. We made very tough decisions. We can call it politics, but these were real decisions that had been put off by successive former ministers and the previous minister—me—made those tough decisions and they were the right decisions.

We are doing everything we can to boost housing stock, but there will still be ongoing decisions regarding renewal. Sales are at historic lows, but we are still doing renewals. I will give the member examples. We have the member for Geraldton with Spalding; the Mayor of the City of Greater Geraldton is a strong advocate of that program. It includes some demolition of housing to break-up and help distribute it. Beaconsfield, Spalding and Withers are all renewal programs that are supported by local councils and communities, but as a result of that decision-making, we will still see some losses and demolitions in the system.

I say we have made the tough decisions. I stand by those tough decisions. The Premier was right when he said that we had enclaves or ghettos. We do not want to create enclaves again. We want to see social housing distributed among communities.

Ms L. METTAM: How does the minister think that social housing residents would feel about being referred to as drug addicts?

The CHAIR: Member for Vasse, it is not in order to ask an opinion about a statement.

Ms L. METTAM: I understand what the minister is saying about making the so-called tough decisions on the renewal program, but as the Premier stated and has been defined, we have seen social housing stock go backwards. Brownlie Towers aside, does the minister acknowledge that not enough was done in that first term of government to ensure that those social houses that were sold off were replaced so that we did not become the rough sleeper capital of the country?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Ha-ha! There is a lot in there. I am not laughing at the context, but the member has put a lot in there.

Ms L. METTAM: I will get a lot back.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Okay; yes. The member is referring to the same section, I take it—paragraph 1.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Mr J.N. CAREY: This is where we fundamentally disagree, and I respect that we have policy differences. But, as I said previously, we had to make a series of successive decisions that were very tough, and I understand it is really easy to say black-and-white issues. No disrespect, but Hon Steve Martin does it with vacant houses—or even Hon Dr Brad Pettitt. They run out and point to a house and say, “See; it’s vacant!” without ever understanding the complex history of that site, the requirement of refurbishments and so forth. I understand the member wants to make it black and white; I get it. But we had to make a number of decisions on ageing stock and this is the critical issue. There is a huge number of ageing stock in the system. It is one of the biggest challenges we face in Western Australia, for our government and future governments. It is because of the age of the properties. We have invested \$12.8 million to do an assessment program to assess 10 000 of those ageing stocks. That was in the original injection of \$875 million that we announced. To date, we have done more than 4 000. That is helping us to plan the future of those properties.

We look at our first term. There were also smaller houses. It all adds up; I know that. We do a demolition here because there has been a vandalism. We do a demolition here because there has been a fire. We do a demolition here because

the stock is so old that the cost to refurbish it might be \$250 000 or \$300 000 so we may as well build a new home. What does the agency do? The agency says that we will demolish the property but retain the land. We will continue that renewal program into the future.

Federal member Ian Goodenough went to North Beach. I do not know whether members remember this. He loves a good social media post; I will give him that. He ran out, did a photo and said, “Look, I have succeeded. Congratulations! I am demolishing North Beach.” What I am saying is, when it suits the opposition’s political purposes, demolitions are a good thing because it is a win for the community, but then they are a bad thing. They are a reality of sound decision-making. We have minimised the house sales. We will still have to do demolitions and we are doing everything we can but we are not doing what the previous government did, which was kick hard decisions down the road. There were seven housing ministers and they did not make a decision about Brownlie Towers, despite it needing \$15 million in upgrades and 160 of those units being vacant. The previous government did not make a decision on it. It was left to us. Of course, lots of decisions were left to us, even at a smaller level.

[8.20 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: Why did the department not rebuild immediately? The minister mentioned Beaconsfield. When will it be replaced?

The CHAIR: Member, can you repeat the question? I did not catch the start of it.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Can you give me a reference?

Ms L. METTAM: On the comments that have been made about the investment to improve social housing stock and the sale of social houses, why did the rebuild not happen immediately? The minister mentioned Beaconsfield. When will the social housing there be replaced?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Larger projects take a significant amount of time. There is significant complexity. I can deal with Beaconsfield first. There is significant complexity in how a renewal is done because there are existing residents. If the member does not mind, I will use North Beach as an example because it is a renewal project that we have finalised. Going back to 1998, all properties at the site were sold. The previous Liberal–National government was unable to secure the purchase of the final two properties for redevelopment; there were a number of social houses but also private properties. It took time to successfully secure the final two privately owned properties and then manage the relocation of the remaining social housing at sites. When we are talking about renewal or redevelopment programs, it is not a simple demolition because, with any suburb or precinct, there will potentially be existing social housing tenants or existing private owners. That was the case at North Beach. Works are underway at Beaconsfield but it is not a matter of simply making a black or white decision. Tenants are not instantaneously kicked out and private owners do not just say, “Yes, I’ll do this straightaway.” For Brownlie Towers, we have money in the site but it requires a significant remediation. There is money in the budget for it this year.

Ms L. METTAM: I take it there is no time frame for Beaconsfield or North Beach?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I might ask my deputy director general to answer on Beaconsfield.

Mr L. McIvor: Thank you, minister. With Beaconsfield, we are working closely with DevelopmentWA because, under the machinery-of-government changes, it does larger-scale land redevelopments. Part of that is master planning and staging planning and making sure that we minimise the disruption that the minister just mentioned in which, if possible, we get a master plan that looks to build the new housing in the same area at different stages before we simply move in and displace people and demolish their existing homes. As part of that, DevelopmentWA has started works around the TAFE site and we have started the initial works around some of the zones, including some commercial properties along South Street.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 501 and paragraph 1 on the \$450 million top-up fund. Can the minister give a time frame around how long it might take to deliver the 700 additional dwellings that are outlined? On the 4 000 new homes, what is the time frame for delivery?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I think the member for Vasse asked me this question in question time. We have made two injections, as the member is aware. The first was the largest injection in the state’s history into social housing and it is additional funding of \$450 million. We set a clear target and we are going to meet that target. I made that commitment on the public record in Parliament. We said that within the first two years, we would reach 1 300 homes. We are reaching that target as of today, which is 25 May. As of today, we have added 1 276 homes. Let me be very clear that in July 2021, we said that we would deliver 1 300 houses within the first two years. Given that we have another month and a half, if I were a betting man, I think we will definitely get to 1 300 and we may get more. I thank the deputy director general! I want to be very clear on that. That is the target. The additional 3 300 was over four years, and we are working through that very heavily. The additional 700 is a rolling program. Planning is already underway because we want flexibility because the funding can be used for a multitude of purposes. It is going to be used for refurbishment. There will be community grants. There will be new builds. There will also be funding for some of the signature projects that we are doing as part of the housing diversity pipeline project.

Ms M. BEARD: What will the impact of these new dwellings be on the social housing waitlist?

Mr J.N. CAREY: There will be more new houses in the system for residents to enjoy. I respect and understand that the member and the opposition want a “gotcha!” moment about changes in housing numbers, but I think I have already outlined very clearly that we are doing everything we can to retain social housing. Social housing sales are at historic lows but there are always factors at play. For example, there are the renewal programs. There will be rolling redevelopments, as I have mentioned. I mentioned North Beach, which the opposition has publicly supported. There is also Beaconsfield and Subiaco East as part of those renewals. Another factor is the flooding in the Kimberley, which will also see some demolitions. Other factors include ageing stock, vandalism and so forth. I want to assure Western Australians that I am very resolute and clear that we are using every lever we can to deliver social housing and that we are meeting our first target of 1 300 in two years.

Ms M. BEARD: Is the line item on page 518 for the “Investment into New Social Housing” part of that \$450 million?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Sorry?

Ms M. BEARD: There is a line item on page 518 under works in progress for “Investment into New Social Housing” and there is \$254 231 000 budgeted for 2023–24. Is that part of those houses?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Deputy director general.

[8.30 pm]

Mr L. McIvor: Thank you, minister. The asset investment program related to investment on page 518 has several line items drawn down from the original social housing investment fund and some programs for which we have already drawn down on from the recently announced social housing investment fund. That line item is where we fund things like our regional modular construction program, some of our spot purchasing program and some of the repurposing of our affordable housing stock. We have allocated and identified funds in preparation for market-led proposals and Housing Diversity Pipeline projects as they come through, as well as things like the Kimberley recovery work and construction. Not all of the full \$450 million that was recently announced sits in the Communities budget yet. Around \$200 million, I think, is still held centrally. We will draw down on that as part of the pipeline of future work. The SHIF is held centrally and as we firm up programs, we draw down on it.

Ms M. BEARD: This is the last question: will the department make any of the investment in new social housing available for non-government providers that want to provide housing for social purposes?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I appreciate the question; it is a good question. We have a strong commitment to the community housing sector. This is pertinent to the answer, but the member may not be aware that I created a community housing reference group with key bodies from the community housing sector, with a pivotal focus on how we can grow the community housing sector in Western Australia. The member may be aware of a project called the Housing Diversity Pipeline, through which we have assessed land to go out to market. Community housing providers are stepping forward with private proponents to say they are interested in utilising that land. It could be discounted, it could be a ground lease or it could be another mechanism such as build-to-rent, by which they create community housing. It is quite an innovative program. We are working through and assessing proponents as we speak. Of course, money will be drawn down if there are successful proposals. I believe most of them will be community housing proposals. It is our intention that there will be further funding for the community housing sector. I want to recognise the already significant amount of funds we have given to the community housing sector. It has been extensive, at around \$150 million for both new builds and refurbishment.

I ask the deputy director general to give further detail so the member can see we are making considerable investment.

Mr L. McIvor: As part of a range of programs, we have issued grants to the community housing sector with a target of more than 300 dwellings. We have looked at refurbishment grants to the tune of \$57 million for 47 community organisations to undertake approximately 800 refurbishments. Work on 236 of those dwellings has commenced and 209 dwellings have already been completed. We have awarded \$16.7 million in remote communities grants to six organisations that cover 10 remote communities to look at improving and maintaining 125 dwellings, of which 59 have had remote maintenance work commence already. We have done two rounds of other grants for new builds, and that is the element that will deliver over 300 new dwellings in partnership with the sector.

Mr J.N. CAREY: After our first round of grants, we had a second round because they were so popular and there were some really viable projects. It was very clear to us that there were opportunities. I also put on record that I have been heavily engaged with the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation, and so have my agencies, because NHFIC and the new housing fund—if the Liberal Party and the Greens come together to pass the new housing fund in the federal arena—will mean we have access to new funds for potential community housing projects. We are doing a big push for community housing projects in Western Australia.

Ms M. BEARD: Just the last question: to go back to providing Government Regional Officers’ Housing for people in regional areas, which the member for Roe mentioned before, is there provision for private investors? I have spoken with people in the regions who would be prepared to build homes for rent, but they need to secure a lease prior. They would get their plans done and would build the house and rent it out to a GROH proponent who wants to rent from them, but they want to secure the lease before they build it.

The CHAIR: This is falling foul of my rules, member for North West Central!

Ms M. BEARD: I know—just one because I am new!

The CHAIR: The member is definitely testing me on a Thursday evening!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: A bit of latitude!

Mr J.N. CAREY: I have to say that the chair has given a lot of leeway to the member for Vasse, who just gave me an avalanche of questions together.

The CHAIR: To be fair, minister, the member for Vasse gave you a lot, but she got a lot in return!

Ms L. METTAM: You did all right.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Can I just say for *Hansard* that the Leader of the Liberal Party said that I did all right. I am going to get that made as a T-shirt now and a bumper sticker, and I will hold that memory forever. I want that in *Hansard*.

I appreciate the question because there is some confusion, including with local governments. Yes, we have a call-to-submissions process; yes, proponents can get a pre-commitment; and, yes, for a 10-year lease. There are opportunities there. Our government is looking at how we can assist local governments. The member for Roe would know this. There is some confusion amongst local governments about how they can best access information on developing GROH—getting access to land and developing workers' accommodation. We are giving strong consideration to how we can better inform local governments, because in certain markets they can be really pivotal players as they either have capacity or landholdings. Also, as part of that, we have a subcommittee of cabinet that includes the Minister for Housing; Lands, which is now me—previously, it was Minister Buti—and also the Minister for Planning. It brings together all my agencies. We are looking at all the different levers and at individual projects across Western Australia, but we are also looking at how we can assist local government.

[8.40 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 4 under significant issues impacting the agency on page 503 of budget paper No 2. Before I go to that, I will respond to the minister's comments about the Greens and the Liberal Party voting together to frustrate the federal housing scenario. I think that Murray Watt demonstrated his frustration, and now he knows how the sheep growers of Western Australia feel about his live export decision. It is much the same stuff.

The CHAIR: Member for Roe —

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: But I digress.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Chair —

The CHAIR: No, I do not need any contributions from the minister or the member for Roe. I will allow you to make that comment, member for Roe, because I think it was fair, given that the minister raised it in his response, but that last analogy was an extraordinarily long bow to draw. If you carry on with your question, we will get on with the division.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you; back to it.

I refer to the spot purchase program. How many homes did the department purchase in 2022–23, and how many are forecast to be purchased each year of the forward estimates period?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I appreciate the question. Spot purchasing is one way in which we secure social housing. For this year, it is estimated to be around 340 homes. Obviously, we are still in this financial year. I understand that the member wants more definitive numbers over the next few years, but the nature of spot purchasing is that it is dependent on market availability. It is easier said than done to simply say, "We are going to meet this figure", because market conditions absolutely change. It is not easy for me to do that.

I also want to say this. I note that in the most recent debate relating to social housing delivery, the Leader of the Opposition respectfully criticised us for spot purchasing; however, ironically, Hon Steve Martin successively called for spot purchasing. Members opposite have called for it and then condemned it. It is one lever that we use, but it is very heavily conditioned on the market and the availability of stock, and, of course, the type of stock. I get to this point: we have very ageing stock. A lot of our existing stock is catered towards more traditional homes. What I need and Western Australia needs is two-bedroom and one-bedroom units because of growing demographic trends and as a reflection of my waitlist. As the member can imagine, spot purchasing is quite an effective tool in the current heated construction market. I will strongly defend spot purchasing. In this heated construction market, it has been an effective tool, but it is always reliant on current and regional market conditions.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Obviously, prices in the housing market have increased over the last two or three years. Does the minister have any figures for the average price that the department is paying now compared with, say, the average price the department paid last year in the spot purchasing program?

Mr J.N. CAREY: That is actually a very good question. The member might have seen that the ABC recently did a big story covering the cost of spot purchasing. I was recently at the Housing and Homelessness Ministerial Council

meeting. It is fair to say that other ministers were in shock and awe at our ability to spot purchase and the cost at which we were getting stock. The simple reality is that the cost of spot purchasing for us is generally towards a cheaper product because it is a smaller product—we are after one and two-bedroom units. But the ministers were in awe because on another coast—if we were to go to Sydney and look at the conditions there—governments cannot spot purchase. It is not even a viable option. It is still a viable option here because there is stock of one and two-bedroom units on the market, which we need.

With respect to an average cost, again, it differs according to where we buy, but I will ask my director general if he wishes to add any further information.

Mr L. McIvor: Like all property, the price will vary based on the location, the size of the dwelling, the size of the land or the structure of the apartment block. Yes, we have generally targeted the one and two-bedroom dwellings more than larger homes. At times, we will look at the waitlist and go looking for something in particular, like a five-bedroom home, which is at the other end of the spectrum and is obviously challenging to build in the current market. But the toughest product to build at the moment is apartments. Therefore, the spot purchasing program remains the most flexible option for us, whereby we can be responsive to the market in different locations and make decisions.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thank the minister for his response. Can the minister supply us with the number of homes that the department has spot purchased in this financial year and the three previous years? Would he be able to supply that by supplementary information?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Can I just clarify what the member is seeking? Does he want the number of homes spot purchased for each year?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The number of homes the department has spot purchased for the last three years, and if the minister has the information to hand, could he tell us how many homes the department has purchased in this financial year?

Mr J.N. CAREY: The deputy director general.

Mr L. McIvor: In the last two years, our spot purchase number has been approximately 672.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry, in how many years?

Mr L. McIvor: Over the last two years, it was 672.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does that include this financial year?

Mr L. McIvor: I am sorry; the last year and the year we are still in now.

Ms L. METTAM: Were 672 homes spot purchased?

Mr L. McIvor: Yes, up to the end of April this year.

Ms L. METTAM: That is up to the end of April. Can the minister break that up into the two years? What is the make-up? Is it about 300 each year?

[8.50 pm]

Mr J.N. CAREY: I believe it will be around 303, but we are just checking. Perhaps the member for Roe could give further views on other matters federally!

The CHAIR: No; I am ruling that out of order!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I can launch into a tirade on live export without a problem at all!

The CHAIR: No, thank you, member for Roe!

Mr J.N. CAREY: There were 672. This is an estimation, but as of 30 April 2023, we have spot purchased 344 in this financial year.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: So it was 328 for the previous financial year.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thanks for supplying that information, minister.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 508 and the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators. The wait time for accommodation under the outcome that affordable housing options are available to eligible Western Australians has increased to 129 weeks in 2022–23 from 116 weeks, with the median wait time increasing to 100 weeks from 81 weeks. How many people and/or households are currently on the waitlist for a social home?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I thank the member for the question. First of all, I want to put it in context. Every housing market in Australia is very tight, and that is recognised in all the press. As we know, the waiting list figures and the waiting times are always connected to a tight rental market. History shows us that when there is a very tight rental market, there will be a waiting list and more demand, because they are connected. People want surety, so they put themselves

on the list. It is acknowledged, even by the opposition spokesperson Hon Steve Martin—he said it in Parliament—that the majority of people on the waiting list have a roof over their head. But, obviously, when there is a tightening in the market, people seek surety.

The member mentioned the waiting list times. I note that when we came to government in March 2017, the average waitlist time for public housing was 148 weeks. I want to put that on the record. Despite the tightening of the rental market and increased demand, the data we have shows that the figure now is still lower than the figure of 148 weeks in March 2017, which we inherited. Also, in terms of the overall number of waiting list applications, the peak was in 2010. Yes, we are facing a tight market and considerable demand. I am very cognisant of that and that is why we are doing everything we can. But at the peak in 2010, under the previous Liberal–National government, it was 24 000.

Ms L. METTAM: Was that the average or median time?

Mr J.N. CAREY: The waiting list had 24 000 applications back in 2010. The member has asked me for the current number on the waiting list and I will give that to her. The current number on the waiting list is 19 195 as at 30 April. That is still below the peak of 24 000.

Ms L. METTAM: How many of those individuals are on the priority waitlist?

Mr J.N. CAREY: The number on the priority list is 4 671. I note for the public record that we regularly provide this information to Parliament.

Ms L. METTAM: Why has the 2023–24 budgeted target increased by 15 weeks for the average wait time and by 28 weeks for the median wait time?

Mr J.N. CAREY: As I have already stated, it reflects the growing demand for housing. I say this sincerely: I do not think anyone finds that surprising. I have been on the public record multiple times. I take this very seriously. That is why we have huge investment to get as many social houses into the system as possible. I also note that all states are facing this. In comparison with other states, we have not seen that kind of growth; other states have had much stronger growth in their waiting lists. This is to be expected in a post-COVID world where there is a tightened rental market. As I have said, the rental market and the waiting list and waiting times are directly connected.

Ms L. METTAM: When the minister talked about the 2017 figures, he referred to 148 weeks. Was that the median or average time?

Mr J.N. CAREY: That was the average.

Ms L. METTAM: Continuing declines in housing affordability is blamed for this worsening indicator. Is the minister anticipating that the situation will get worse before it gets better?

[9.00 pm]

Mr J.N. CAREY: I will put it in this context, and, again, I think I have said this before in Parliament: COVID radically reshaped Australian housing markets. Everyone agrees with that, and it is due to a multitude of factors. Western Australia was hit because Australians, including Western Australians, returned home. In fact, it is on the record that people migrated interstate; they left some states and moved to Western Australia and Queensland. We have a heated construction market and skilled labour challenges and there have been global supply chain issues. All of this has squeezed housing markets in both Western Australia and Australia.

I am not in the prediction game, but I am acutely focused on boosting social housing delivery. I know that the member might get bored by it, but I quickly put on the record the number of different reforms that we have brought in to accelerate the delivery of social housing because I think it is important. We bring in record funding injections for social housing. We accelerate the delivery of social housing through a new panel program, a new timber frame program and a new modular program. We revise our procurement procedures. We enable the Department of Communities to be a self-approving authority for smaller housing units. We bring in planning reforms to streamline approvals. We have announced a skilled worker package to boost construction workers. We have brought in a concession for stamp duty that we just lifted to \$650 000, which is in a different direction from where other people are heading. We created an infrastructure fund that is funding headworks for both key workers' accommodation and infill. We created a community grant scheme to boost the community housing sector. We are using spot purchasing for both new pilot homelessness programs. We have purchased the Murray Street Lodge, which we are converting into transitional accommodation and Boorloo Bidee Mia. We are doing a massive refurbishment program. We have sales at record lows. I mean—by God—a lot of reform is happening in that space! I do not think anyone could look at those reforms and say that they are not significant, and we are constantly looking at other measures to assist housing supply.

We also know this: 27 500 homes are under construction right now. Yes, there are challenges, and we acknowledge those challenges. We are getting more skilled labour in, but those homes will be completed, and as those homes are completed, they will also provide relief to the rental market.

Ms M. BEARD: On page 518 under new works is the line item “Youth Long-Term Housing and Support Program” with an amount allocated for 2023–24. Can the minister expand on what that relates to?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Effectively, the building, construction and buying arm of my agency is used as the transition to secure properties, particularly given the staff have significant expertise. In the 2021 election, we made a clear commitment of \$18 million to establish the youth transitional housing and support program. The Mental Health Commission funds the acquisition of 20 properties, but they are acquired by my agency over two financial years. Those properties are used by the Mental Health Commission. We get the money from them; we buy the properties, but they then manage the program.

Ms M. BEARD: Would transitional housing for domestic violence and women's refuges be the same if they were looking to secure transitional housing in those circumstances?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Yes, that is the case. Obviously not under this program but under the other programs, we would buy the capital and then it would be transferred across for management.

Ms L. METTAM: Page 518, under the asset investment program, lists the Common Ground facility. I refer to the minister's comments that construction of the Perth Common Ground was expected to commence during the 2021–22 financial year. What does the minister anticipate to be the new construction start date for this project?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I assure the member that, despite the media release the shadow Minister for Housing put out saying the project had been shelved, that is not the case. As the member would be aware, we face a very heated construction market, and that has affected projects across the board. We are certainly committed to the project. It is going through a tender process. We put it back out to tender, and that evaluation process is currently underway. I ask the deputy director general to add further comments.

Mr L. McIvor: The East Perth Common Ground tender closed in February this year. At the moment, we are going through the evaluation process, which includes detailed reviews of designs, engineering and compliance, and, obviously, commercial and legal reviews. That process should be completed very soon.

Ms L. METTAM: When does the minister anticipate construction will start on this project, understanding the challenges of delivering?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I will say two things. First, obviously, once the tender assessment is done and completed, we will have a construction schedule. Second, the member might have missed it, but I announced an additional interim measure that was to bring into effect the pilot program for homes for rough sleepers. We spot purchase units for that pilot program. It is a supported landlord model and has 100 homes or units for rough sleepers. They are referred by a transitional rough sleeper coordinator group. As part of that, Housing Choices manages the property; it provides the support to sustain the tenancy. Then, of course, it is within a Housing First Homelessness Initiative area, from Perth to Bunbury, and that ensures that rough sleepers have access to other services. I announced that last year as part of a reform package, and that pilot-supported landlord model is now being rolled out. In addition, we have added 120 crisis beds in the meantime. I appreciate that the construction market has created a challenge for Common Ground, but I did not just sit still. We created a new pilot program to enable us to transition rough sleepers into supported homes.

[9.10 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: My other question was in relation to Housing Choices and the announcement that was made in November last year to fast-track 100 people who were experiencing chronic homelessness. How many people are currently being supported by this program?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I really appreciate the member asking this question. This is based on a model that occurred in Bunbury with a smaller number. As part of that, there are 100 properties to be obtained as stock. As at 24 May, 42 properties are part of the program with 35 individuals currently being accommodated with intensive wraparound support. It is on track. I am very pleased with the pace of the program. However, I want to put this on record before the member decides that she thinks it is a bad figure and pumps out a media release: it is a referral process. As part of reforms that I have brought in, we are integrating outreach programs in the city. We have established rough sleeper coordinating groups that bring together everyone who works on homelessness. When you think about it, it makes sense. We have one in the Perth CBD, that I personally attended, and we have one in Bunbury, Rockingham, Mandurah and Geraldton.

I know that it does not tantalise people or make great media, but this is a genuine and successful reform. It is common sense: we bring together in the one room everyone who is working on homelessness, we meet on a regular basis, we go through those people who are rough sleeping, we share information and we identify people who can be referred to the pilot program. The truth and the complexity of this program is that it is not simply that someone rocks up and goes, "I want to do it", because we want to make sure that those people can be sustained in the tenancy and that they are the right person to enter that program. It may be the case instead that it would be better that they go to Boorloo Bidee Mia because not every rough sleeper can make the step to the pilot program. I think it is on track. We said that we would roll this out in a staggered way, but it is very on track.

As the member would be aware, we are also committed to a regional pilot program. As the member can guess, that is far more complex because regional communities and markets are more challenging, obviously. We have already

talked about spot purchasing and also accessing homelessness services. I am on the record in Parliament about the regional program. That will occur over a longer time. To date, I am very pleased with the success of the program. We continue to identify properties to spot purchase.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify, that was 42 homes and 35 people?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: Does that represent the challenge in trying to identify persons suitable? There are more homes than people.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I think the member's question is: why is there a difference between the 42 and 35? That is because we spot purchase a property and there is then a basic transaction process, it may need some refurbishment—changes or improvement—and then there is a referral. The advice from the executive director of the Office of Homelessness is that we said we would deliver this program over a year. In fact, we are ahead of the schedule or tracking for the number of individuals and properties to be secured, remembering that this is a program to be delivered over a year, and we started the program in January.

The CHAIR: Before I give the call to the member for Vasse, we have about 45 minutes to go and two authorities and two divisions to get through, and there are some advisers at the back desperately waiting for their turn. How do members want to manage it? I am fine to keep going on this division; I just want an indication from you about how you want to manage the time.

Ms M. BEARD: I have a quick question about the extensions that were given for the builder grants.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I am sorry, member, that is not in my portfolio.

The appropriation was recommended.

Keystart Housing Scheme Trust —

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr J.N. Carey, Minister for Housing.

Ms N. Brown, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr L. McIvor, Deputy Director General, Department of Communities.

Ms C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Housing.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. Questions must relate to the operations and budget of the off-budget authority. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the member for Roe the call.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 527 of budget paper No 2, paragraph 1. Has Keystart seen softness in the first home buyers' market? If so, can the minister comment on this relative to the long-term average for Western Australia? Is he seeing a slowdown in the market, given the cost of living and interest rate increases et cetera?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I think the member has already made this assessment: it is obvious in the current climate when we have seen successive interest rate rises that there is a lot more uncertainty for buyers. People put off decisions to buy a home and, obviously, that affects all products in the market. I will ask Nicole Brown to make further comment.

Ms N. Brown: I agree with the minister's comments. We are seeing softness generally across the book, whether it is first home buyers or applicants in general.

[9.20 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister able to supply figures on how many loans Keystart signed up in 2022–23, and also how many are anticipated to be signed in 2023–24?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I am not going to do anticipation, but we can provide the numbers for this financial year. I will ask Nicole to answer.

Ms N. Brown: Is the member talking about the period to 30 April?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is correct.

Ms N. Brown: They are our most recent figures. We have approved a total of 839 loans.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Also, is it possible to get the figures for the previous financial year so that I can get a comparison?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Yes.

Ms N. Brown: For the full financial year 2021–22, we approved 2 514 loans.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister enlighten me on the current Keystart home loan rate? How does it compare to the current market average?

Mr J.N. CAREY: As the member would be aware, a prescribed policy is set in place. I think the member knows it well. The rate is set in accordance with the four big banks. We have to remember—I have heard some public debate about this—that ultimately Keystart is a transitional lender. We ultimately want people to move on to another product. Keystart provides the up-front benefits with regards to insurance and so forth, but it is set in accordance with that policy. I will ask Ms Brown to comment further.

Ms N. Brown: In relation to the member’s specific question, our current interest rate is 8.01 per cent. As the minister mentioned, that is the average of the big four banks’ standard variable rate. Given that those rates have just increased, the rate will be increased to 8.26 per cent from the start of June.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the current rate of delinquency on loans and is the rate trending up from previous years?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I think the member would agree that Keystart is a well-respected institution in Western Australia. In fact, other states hold it in high regard as a mechanism to enable people to enter the market for the first time. Its record and reputation is also based on the fact that it does really work with its clients, particularly given it is a transitional lender, and it is in its interest to sustain its clients. It does work very hard if a client experiences financial difficulty. I think the member is inferring that given cost-of-living pressures and interest rate rises, it is natural that we would see additional pressures for some clients. I ask Ms Brown to make a further comment.

Ms N. Brown: I would agree with those comments. In fact, in the industry generally, customers are experiencing increasing financial pressures through rising interest rates and cost-of-living pressures.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Do we have any numbers on how much default or delinquency has increased, say, over the last six to eight months perhaps or in this financial year up until April? Has the member seen a dramatic rise in the number of defaults compared with, say, the previous financial year?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Does the member mind if we take that on notice so we can provide further detail?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We will take that on notice. Further, just as a summary, without the numbers of course, has the minister seen an increase in the number of defaults—just as a general concept if you like?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Yes, we have, and that is reflective of the entire market across the board. I am happy to provide that information that the member previously asked for.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there a delinquency in the 30-day arrears rate, say from April 2023 compared with June 2022?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Can we please provide that by way of supplementary information? I am happy to do so.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

The CHAIR: Can I clarify the information that will be provided by way of supplementary information?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is the 30-day arrears or delinquency rate in April 2023 compared with June 2022.

[*Supplementary Information No B14.*]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has Keystart experienced an increase in the number of loans applied for or that originated as a result of the building boost?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Yes. As I expect, many did but it is not related to this financial year, which we have already reported on.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of the Keystart Housing Scheme Trust

Division 43: Planning, Lands and Heritage — Service 2, Lands, \$65 421 000—

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr J.N. Carey, Minister for Lands.

Mr A. Kannis, Director General.

Mr M. Darcey, Assistant Director General, Land Use Management.

Mr D. Corr, Executive Director, Land Use Management.

Ms A. Gibson, Executive Director, Land Use Management.

Mr M. Hanrahan, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Lands.

Ms J. Lim, Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by 12 noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

[9.30 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 715 and “Amendments to the *Land Administration 1997 Act*” under significant issues impacting the agency. Pursuant to our recent discussions with the legislation that went through Parliament in relation to the policy framework for diversification leases and unlocking the economic potential of unutilised land et cetera, can the minister outline the timing for that policy to be released and the extent of stakeholder engagement?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I thank the member for the question. As he knows, that framework is about the decision-making processes used to consider how we select and choose a diversification lease proponent. We went out for consultation. That feedback has now been received and we are giving it consideration. I understand that we got extensive feedback. I ask the director whether there is any further information.

Ms A. Gibson: There was quite a considerable number of public submissions. As a result of those submissions, we have recommended to the minister for consideration of at least 35 alterations to the policy.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given we had copious discussions at the consideration in detail stage and the like, has the minister given any further thought to support for some of these landholders who may have potentially two or three different uses on their diversification lease and the support that they will need, whether it be legal support or consultation or whatever?

Mr J.N. CAREY: In short, ultimately, these decisions are between private entities. For example, someone may approach a pastoral lease holder and they will enter into discussions and come to a commercial arrangement. That is the free market. Our role is to provide support for Indigenous land use agreements. As the member would be aware, that is required. Understanding that that can be new to people, we provide support in that regard. But it is not the role of the state to be involved or provide support in negotiations between a pastoral lease owner and another private proponent, whether it is a hydrogen, tourism or carbon proponent or any other proponents. I do not think the state should actually be involved in providing that sort of support because there are commercial decisions to be made.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I think, as I pointed out at the time, that it is the complexity of dealing with perhaps three or four or whatever different entities that might be challenge for a pastoral industry. But I will let that one go.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 714 and new initiatives. I note the funding associated with “Tjiwarl Palyakuwa Indigenous Land Use Agreement”. It was confidential pending the conclusion of its registration, which I understand would have happened or was to occur late this month.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Sorry, member; that is not my portfolio. Lands also reports to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, so it is under him.

Ms L. METTAM: I assume that is the same with cultural heritage.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Yes, it is; I am sorry. We will move on.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 45: Western Australian Land Information Authority, \$51 753 000 —

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr J.N. Carey, Minister for Lands.

Mr G. Gammie, Chief Executive.

Mr G. Dewar, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Lands.

Ms J. Lim, Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 743 and the line item “Land Information and Services” in the service summary table. The budget for 2023–24 is around \$10 million above the estimated actual, and then the forecast falls in the out years. Can the minister explain these forecasts?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I ask the chief executive to respond.

Mr G. Gammie: Thank you. The difference in the budget for the year 2022–23 relates to government’s approval of Landgate’s proposal to develop a spatial digital twin for Western Australia. That is the first year of funding that will enable us to complete a project definition plan that will set out the technology road map, technology solution, risk management plan, benefits realisation plan and all the bits and pieces that go into deciding to progress to the next steps with that particular program. That program will deliver a piece of state digital infrastructure that will enable government agencies to share and collaborate on location information in a three-dimensional to four-dimension spatial model of Western Australia. A virtual copy of Western Australia will allow them to do all sorts of interesting things, including improve asset management, planning and so on.

[9.40 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: Can I clarify the name of the program?

Mr G. Gammie: The program is called Spatial WA.

Ms L. METTAM: Is it anticipated that there will be an increase in funds for the set-up cost of Spatial WA? Then will there be recurrent costs going forward and is that reflected in the funding?

Mr J.N. CAREY: It is not at that stage yet. It is effectively only at the early development stage.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: A paragraph here relates to Spatial WA, saying the increase in the number of employees from the 2021–22 actual to the 2022–23 estimated actual is the result of the realignment of resource requirements. Is there any further explanation for that or what it actually means?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I will get the chief executive to answer that question.

Mr G. Gammie: The change in FTE numbers is simply a reallocation amongst the services within Landgate. There is no increase or decrease in numbers. It is simply a reallocation to different services.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 744; the key effectiveness indicator reads —

The land titles register is updated and maintained in a timely and accurate manner ...

Can the minister advise, for each month of 2023 to date, the average time taken to register a change of title? Has it been improving?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I think this is important to put on the record because there was some incorrect reporting in the media. I saw all these other claims were made. We have a booming economy. I think the member knows that and I know that. We have an incredible housing market. Landgate has experienced near-record numbers of documents being lodged in recent years. To give members a sense, between 2014 and 2021, lodgements averaged 298 000 a year. Last year, more than 400 000 land registry documents were lodged, with 2023 trending towards a similar number of lodgements. In 2023, more than 32 500 transfer documents were lodged and 80 per cent of them were lodged electronically with 94 per cent being automatically registered within minutes of lodgement. However, of course, there are more complex cases, so time frames can be longer. Landgate generally works with settlement agencies in order to address any lodgement areas or get more information. That gives the member the broader trends. I might leave it to the chief executive to add further information.

Mr G. Gammie: The KPI on page 744 refers to simple and correct documents. That is a transfer, a mortgage, a discharge of mortgage, a caveat or a discharge of caveat. They are our top five documents. That takes up about 80 per cent of total lodgements. As the minister mentioned, about 80 per cent of those are lodged electronically and most of those are registered within minutes. Our actual performance of just under 90 per cent reflects the level of electronic lodgements. The balance are paper documents that need to be examined by a person and they are passed before registration.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister comfortable that these new arrangements are really improving the efficiency? Obviously, I think those numbers probably explain that, but is the electronic system proving to be much more effective than the former paper system in the world document transfers?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Overall, I can say I am very satisfied with the performance of Landgate, particularly given, as I indicated, the near-record number of registrations coming through because of the booming market. I ask the chief executive to make further comment.

Mr G. Gammie: The electronic system that we currently use today is a system that was originally developed by Landgate. It continues to operate at similar levels since its partial commercialisation a few years ago. Not much has changed there. We are seeing a growing number of more complex dealings being lodged. Leases and those sorts of things are coming into play as part of a busier market. Those are the things that we continue to need to examine on a manual basis, but the digital processes are working very well and to the same standard as they were before.

Ms L. METTAM: I am sorry if I missed this but is the minister able to explain the average time taken to register a change of title?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I did say it, but I will leave it to the chief executive.

Mr G. Gammie: If a dealing is lodged electronically through Property Exchange Australia and the documents are what we call true and correct, they will be registered immediately—within seconds of lodgement. As they are handled digitally, there is no human intervention. That covers around 80 per cent of total lodgements, which are what we call simple and correct documents. They are the typical residential transfers with a mortgage attached—those sorts of issues. Lodgements made in paper take a bit longer because they need to be manually examined. Under the act, we are required to examine them in the order in which they are lodged, so they take a little bit longer to get through depending on what is in the examination pipeline. At the moment, our turnaround times on manually lodged transfers is about 30 days. Of course, the transfer itself is effective from the date it is lodged so everyone's interests are protected—the exiting owner, the incoming owner, the exiting bank and the incoming bank are all protected within that environment. It is basically going through the examination process to make sure that everything in those paper documents is correct and in a form that the registrar is happy to register.

[9.50 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: There was a report earlier this year about wait times for the registering of a change of title blowing out by as much as six months. Has this been addressed? Is the minister aware of that? There was a report in March by Kim Macdonald.

Mr G. Gammie: I am sorry. We are not aware of any particular blowouts in registering transfers. They are either done digitally in real time or within about 30 days being the average time for paper-lodged documents. I am not aware of any significant delays. New titles and those sorts of things are typically issued once clearances are obtained through the Western Australian Planning Commission and that happens within a matter of days. We are certainly meeting industry's requirements for quick turnaround times and things like subdivisions and new titles. There are no blowouts in transfers being registered.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I recall a case in which someone in, I think, South Africa or somewhere managed to work the system to get a transfer into someone's home that was not the right thing and the transfer ended up in the wrong person's name. Are there any systems in place or has that scenario been improved?

The CHAIR: This is not how I wanted to end the evening, member for Roe!

Mr J.N. CAREY: I thank the member for referring to page 745 on South African scams, and I will take that! South African scams are growing! I will take the answer. I ask the CEO to answer.

Mr G. Gammie: Yes, that is a well-known case. I think Nigeria might have been the origin of that one. There has been no subsequent fraud of that nature since that occasion. As a consequence of that experience, Landgate introduced the verification-of-identity process, which is required to be undertaken by a lawyer or a licensed settlement agent if they are representing parties. If the party is self-represented, they need to have their identity verified by the local post office, so there is a very high benchmark. That creates a process to make sure the people lodging documentation are the right people. Since that process was implemented some years ago, there have been no subsequent cases of title fraud.

The appropriation was recommended.

DevelopmentWA —

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr J.N. Carey, Minister for Lands.

Mr D. Mudford, Acting Chief Executive Officer.

Mrs F. Barclay, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Lands.

Mr C. Ward, Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. Questions must relate to the operations and budget of the off-budget authority. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 753 of budget paper No 2 and the significant issue of responding to the state's social and affordable housing needs and that DevelopmentWA is pursuing delivery of one and two-bedroom homes, which the minister referred to earlier, that are aligned to the needs of people seeking social and affordable housing in proximity to services and major transport precincts. Can the minister explain how this is being achieved and where these homes are being developed?

Mr J.N. CAREY: There is one way that I think has always been established, and that has been through joint venture partners. DevelopmentWA will do those and lots will be allocated to social housing that Communities will build on. The second way is the diversity housing pipeline. This is new for DevelopmentWA. I talked about the subcommittee of cabinet. My one message to future governments is to keep housing and lands portfolios with the same minister, because land and DevelopmentWA are a critical part of getting social housing done. Effectively, DevelopmentWA, with Communities, is assisting us as part of the housing diversity project to identify projects for which it has oversight to deliver. This is new for government to do a housing diversity pipeline. We are also seeking National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation funds. Since I have been the Minister for Lands, we have really done this big push for part of DevelopmentWA's key functions to look at how it can use its development potential to create social housing, so it is via the housing diversity pipeline. I might ask the acting director general to say a few more words.

Mr D. Mudford: I agree with the minister's comments. We are actively looking at identifying land parcels that DevelopmentWA has that could be suitable for one and two-bedroom accommodation or townhouse-style accommodation, and then trying to work with community housing providers, the Department of Communities and NHFIC funding to look at packaging together opportunities to get those developments off the ground. We have identified some pipeline projects and landholdings that we have; now we are looking to piece together how the funding model works for that and how community housing providers tap into that.

Mr J.N. CAREY: This is new in that it is effectively build to rent. We could give the land freehold, so DevelopmentWA may build the project and then a community housing partners with it. A builder comes along, then we hand over the keys, and we have a mix. As the member would be aware, we have asked in the diversity pipeline for one in five, because that enables the viability of the project. This is a longer term piece of work, but the aim is that if we get one project up, it shows its success and we can build on it. We will also be using the social housing fund. The social housing fund will assist with some funding. We may provide the land, and then it is built with a community housing provider, and it obtains funds from us, as well as NHFIC plus its own philanthropic funds.

Ms L. METTAM: Where are the priority locations? Where are they going to?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Some of them are on the record. For example, there is Subiaco east for which we will go out soon. That is a particular project. There is Smith Street, but that is being done under the Department of Communities. I want to be very clear that we are looking at which agencies they are. It could either be DevelopmentWA or the Department of Communities, but generally the trend will be DevelopmentWA.

Ms L. METTAM: What locations are being looked at in regional areas?

Mr J.N. CAREY: The member for Vasse may be aware that there is one in her electorate as part of the housing diversity pipeline.

Ms L. METTAM: In Brown Street?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Yes—in Busselton. That is currently being assessed. We will seek other regional opportunities, but it is harder because these are density developments. They will be different levels so it does not mean someone will get a seven-storey in Busselton, although I am sure that it is one the member would like, because these tend towards density developments.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of DevelopmentWA.

Committee adjourned at 10.00 pm
