

Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Margaret Quirk; Dr Kim Hames; Ms Simone McGurk; Chairman

Metropolitan Cemeteries Board —

Mr I.C. Blayney, Chairman.

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

Mr P. Deague, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr J. Fortuna, Director, Finance; Chief Finance Officer.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

Members may raise questions relating to the operations and budgets of the off-budget authority. Off-budget authority officers are recognised as ministerial advisers. It is the intention of the Chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by Friday, 3 June 2016. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice with the Clerk's office.

I give the call to the member for Mandurah.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer the minister to page 779 of the budget papers. I have a series of questions; some may be able to be answered now, but others may need to be answered as supplementary information. I would like an indication of the unit cost of a funeral and/or cremation at each of the cemeteries under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board for the years 2013–14, 2014–15 and 2015–16 year to date. I ask because I want an understanding of the trending costs for individuals' funerals. I would like an understanding of the costs the cemeteries board levies against families seeking to have their loved one cremated and/or buried, and what those costs look like.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I may have to take a bit of that on notice, because it is quite detailed going back over —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for the minister to do that. Maybe the chief executive officer could provide a general comment.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, I will pass over to Peter for a general comment. I will make some observations about the fact that the —

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, if you are going to provide some supplementary information, could you perhaps define that now, please?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am going to provide as supplementary information the figures for the cost of a cremation or burial for the years 2013–14, 2014–15 and 2015–16 year to date.

[*Supplementary Information No B83.*]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will add a bit more to the answer before I hand over to Peter for a bit of detail. A lot of this information is available to the wider community in the annual report of the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board. Peter might be able to elaborate.

Mr P. Deague: The board charges just under \$1 000 for a cremation and it is about the same price for a burial, but the actual grant of right of burial costs about \$2 000. The current price is about \$3 000.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Does that vary depending upon the cemetery where the burial or cremation takes place? There is Pinnaroo Valley Chapel and Crematorium and Karrakatta Cemetery. Does Rockingham have a cremator?

Mr P. Deague: It will do early next year.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I asked for information on each of the cemeteries under the board's jurisdiction, so is there a variance in cost? In other words, is it cheaper to be cremated at Karrakatta than at Pinnaroo et cetera?

Mr P. Deague: No.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister will provide that supplementary information.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the member for Mandurah have a further question?

Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Margaret Quirk; Dr Kim Hames; Ms Simone McGurk; Chairman

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes. Again, I am happy for this information for the same years to be received via supplementary information. How many paupers' funerals were conducted at the cemeteries under the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board for the years mentioned in the previous question?

Mr P. Deague: We can provide that data, yes.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am happy to provide supplementary information on —

Mr P. Deague: Pauper graves, or government graves as we call them these days.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Government graves, yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This sounds strange perhaps, but is there a preferred cemetery where those government funerals or paupers' funerals are carried out?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Mr Deague will answer.

Mr P. Deague: Yes; Karrakatta.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is that for all of them?

Mr P. Deague: Yes, but we will have to review that for Rockingham Regional Memorial Park, based on the new crematorium and the growth in that urban corridor.

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, are you going to provide some more supplementary information?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: In regard to how many?

Mr P. Deague: Over that same period of time.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Over that same period of time in the previous question, how many government or paupers —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Through to present, yes.

[Supplementary Information No B84.]

[12.40 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have a final question about cemeteries in this context. I note in the program of new works that there is obviously continued major building upgrade of Rockingham Regional Memorial Park. What is the status of this building program and what capacity will the ultimate upgrade deliver?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The Metropolitan Cemeteries Board has \$6.2 million budgeted for asset investment this year. All of this is self-funded from operations; it is a self-funded organisation. There is \$973 000 in the budget in the coming year 2016–17 for cremators at Rockingham. The total cost of the crematorium facility at Rockingham Regional Memorial Park is budgeted at \$2.4 million. This figure is over and above the cost for the actual cremators. A tender has been chosen to supply, install and commission the cremators, and the design work for the building is nearly finalised. This will be a fantastic community asset when it is completed and it will benefit the region surrounding Rockingham, including residents in the Peel region because they will not always have to travel to Fremantle or Karrakatta, which they currently do. The cemeteries will be more convenient to residents around those areas to organise funeral services. This facility will have a crematorium for the corridor from the Peel region to Rockingham.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister mentioned Peel. The City of Mandurah has on numerous occasions reviewed the need, if any, for a crematorium in Mandurah. I am assuming that the view of the cemeteries board is that Rockingham will cater for the catchment further south into Peel, so is that something the cemeteries board would encourage in the City of Mandurah in the medium term?

Mr P. Deague: That is correct. The city does not have the authority to construct a crematorium. I have been liaising with all the local government chief executive officers in that region explaining that the state has provided funds for a crematorium to service that urban corridor, and the expansion of that urban corridor as well.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: From your statistics and projections, will the proposed build at Rockingham cater for the growth that is projected in the Perth and Peel@3.5million planning process?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Before I hand over to Mr Deague, I point out that the Rockingham facility is owned by the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board; it is its asset. The one to which the member refers in Mandurah is owned by the City of Mandurah. The reality would be that in the future—I will pass to Peter for more detail—it is a matter of identifying more areas for cemeteries in the metropolitan area. The department works very closely

Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Margaret Quirk; Dr Kim Hames; Ms Simone McGurk; Chairman

with Planning on doing that, which we have done. We have identified Whiteman Park and the one at Whitby, which is in my electorate of Darling Range on South West Highway. I do not know whether Peter has identified one in the Peel region besides Whitby, but he will add to that, and that will possibly be done in the future, but in the short to medium term the crematorium will be in Rockingham. I am not sure where the other one is, Peter.

Mr P. Deague: Yes, it is inland, or east, from Singleton, and north of the main business area of Mandurah itself. In working with the Western Australian Planning Commission and based on the population growth for that urban corridor we have determined that we have sufficient land on a sustainable basis based on the urban growth projections.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I, too, refer to page 779. I have noticed in my frequent attendances recently at both Pinnaroo and Karrakatta cemeteries that there are numerous signs about theft. I have also heard a number of media reports about that. How much assistance are the police giving and what other work is being done in that regard?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will hand over to Peter for the fine detail. This is a common theme at a time when a person is probably at their lowest emotionally when attending a funeral; their guard is probably not as sharp as it should be. The most recent event was not a good outcome when a lady was less than 20 metres away visiting a loved one at the grave. The board puts up as many signs as it can to say, “Lock before you leave. Make sure there is nothing on display in your car.” The opportunists who break in and steal from cars are quite common. We all know that when people attend a funeral they will be there for an hour, so it is pretty easy pickings in that case. However, the board is conscious to make sure it educates the public as much as possible. Through the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board, Peter has put in a fair bit of work to get clearer transparency and ensure that any vegetation is further away from the road and that the road has clear access so that no-one is parking or hiding behind trees. Unfortunately, the hardest thing for us is that although we provide a considerable amount of parking, especially around Karrakatta, it overflows a fair bit with the crossovers between funerals. If they are large funerals for popular people, there will be a spillover to a parking area along road, towards the trees. I know that the MCB has been conscious of and done a fair bit of work around that.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Are the police doing enough?

Mr P. Deague: Yes, we work closely with the police and they have a number of operations, particularly at Karrakatta. We are working with the police to enable them in the near future to have access to all our CCTV cameras, which will give them live access to any issues regarding people of concern, particularly with some of the larger bikie funerals that have been a concern in the past. We are certainly working towards that link.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Currently the police do not have a video link; is that correct?

Mr P. Deague: They have access to our data, but not the live link at the moment. Local government rangers also patrol all our cemeteries, and they do an excellent job.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I have a further question on the subject of large funerals, which the minister mentioned. Why are there so few seats in the large crematorium at Karrakatta? It never ceases to amaze me that even the smallest funeral fills the room and there is quite a lot of room for additional seating.

Mr P. Deague: We are reviewing that. The chapel was constructed in the 1990s. We are reviewing that for the next financial year. We are looking to increase the seating capacity as well.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Dawesville.

Dr K.D. HAMES: The member for Mandurah asked a question I wanted to ask about Rockingham, so I have no further questions.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I refer to page 779. Can the minister explain why the total funding for 2015–16 is \$13.7 million, but for 2016–17 that drops down to \$6.3 million and in the forward estimates it stays around \$7 million and then in the outer years is \$6 million?

Mr J. Fortuna: Yes, that is predominantly for larger projects in 2015–16 that relate to Fremantle Cemetery and the cafe and kiosk that will be constructed.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Is it for the upgrade of facilities?

Mr J. Fortuna: That is correct. Obviously it is due to the Rockingham Regional Memorial Park project as well.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: This year nearly \$1 million is allocated to the Rockingham Cemetery. We are also finalising a brand-new cafe and meeting place at Fremantle Cemetery, which will open next month. That has been an ongoing problem for us. The reason for the drop in the budget allocation is that money is going out—\$1 million will go to Rockingham and to Fremantle—and, of course, we are always looking to reinvest on the infrastructure at the other cemeteries to ensure our beautiful assets are maintained.

Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Margaret Quirk; Dr Kim Hames; Ms Simone McGurk; Chairman

Ms S.F. McGURK: However, for 2016–17 it is less than half of what it was in 2015–16. I do not have in front of me the figures for the total funding of assets and investments for previous years. Can the minister supply what the total asset investment program was for the previous four years?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am happy to provide as supplementary information for the years 2011–12, 2012–13, 2013–14 and 2014–15 the figure for asset replacement; that is, the money that was spent on infrastructure, upgrades and facilities that have been provided through the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board.

[Supplementary Information No B85.]

[12.50 pm]

Ms S.F. McGURK: It would be remiss of me if I did not mention the C5 monument section at Fremantle Cemetery. We have had ongoing complaints about the maintenance. Although it has improved over time, a particular community with family resting in that place has continued to be frustrated at the inconsistent level of attention to that area. There are probably other areas where people feel either pleased or unhappy with the level of maintenance, but this is a particularly active community.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Just to clarify, C5 is a part of Fremantle Cemetery, where there are currently graves in the ground, and this question is to do with the maintenance of that area. I will pass over to Mr Deague to give details about the maintenance and gardening in this section of the cemetery.

Mr P. Deague: For many years we have been working with a few people who have concerns about C5, which is a full monumental Roman Catholic section. In the business that I am in, I am dealing with grieving people, and some people find it very difficult to understand that in the full monumental section, although they expect perfection, there is sandy soil, and other people who do not tend the graves as well as others. They spend a lot of money on monumental work, and we do the very best we can on C5, considering that we manage close to 400 hectares. We spend quite a bit of time with a particular person down in C5, and we have fulfilled the requests that he has made over many years. I expect that he will still want to liaise with us to ensure that the standards that we have now are maintained, which we will do for him.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer again to page 779. There are a number of VC graves at Karrakatta. I think we spoke about this last year. They are not separately heritage listed. I recall that the response last year was that the cemetery as a whole was going to be heritage listed. What measures are being taken to protect those graves?

The CHAIRMAN: Perhaps the member can clarify VC graves.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: They are the graves of people who are recipients of the Victoria Cross. There is a bit of history in that cemetery, as members can well imagine, and it is important that we hang on to it in the future, but I will defer to Mr Deague to say what we are doing to hang on to that history.

Mr P. Deague: We have a cemetery renewal program, and a memorandum of understanding with the Office of Australian War Graves, which is a federal government agency, to retain official war graves, including the VC graves. I have had that reviewed by the State Heritage Office, and it is very happy with the process that we follow, and does not consider that it needs to put any further planning instruments over the cemetery, on the basis that we already have a clear process under the cemetery legislation to retain those graves. That is recorded in our cemetery record system, which again under our legislation, is a statutory responsibility. They are essentially retained for perpetuity at no cost to any individual.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: As the minister is aware, these graves are not all on one site; they are scattered around the cemetery and around the state.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Further to that, given the increasing interest in genealogy, family history and people seeking information on their heritage, what does the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board currently provide, or plan to provide, for people seeking direct information about members of their family who may be interred in some of the cemeteries under its control?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will pass this on to Peter Deague, CEO of the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board.

Mr P. Deague: In our records, which we also have on our website, people can search anyone who has been interred or cremated, or has memorial plaques in any of our cemeteries. That goes back to when Karrakatta Cemetery opened in 1897, and likewise Fremantle Cemetery and the historic cemeteries of Guildford. We have all those records. We liaise closely with any families or researchers about their requirements. Again, it is our statutory responsibility to retain those records.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: On the VC graves, for example, is there a specific application or site that would enable the historical enthusiast of World War I or World War II to find exactly where all the graves are? Rather than having to scroll through all the records, is there a way in which individual plots can be shown on a map—for example where all the VC recipients in Karrakatta are? Has any of that nature been developed?

Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Margaret Quirk; Dr Kim Hames; Ms Simone McGurk; Chairman

Mr P. Deague: No there is not, but there is no reason why we cannot do that. We are updating our cemetery record system, and it is a good suggestion. We could certainly do that.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I think it is good for tourism. Many people travel the world going to famous sites in cemeteries. My mate, with whom I used to work in the entertainment industry, loved pulling into cemeteries in country towns. I thought it was quite an interesting bent that he had.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Just to answer that, we have done a fair bit of work with the cemetery. The member touched on the fact that his friend likes to go into cemeteries to see who is there. People walking into Karrakatta and Fremantle cemeteries can get a little map, with a QR code that can be read by a mobile phone and, using headphones, they can hear the history of the person. There is a guided tour of Karrakatta that can be done, exploring the pioneers, as well as interesting people with chequered histories. It is a really interesting tour, and a smart way of doing it. The Metropolitan Cemeteries Board is keen to make our cemeteries a place of destination, and we even hold some small concerts in cemeteries throughout the year. We try to make them people places—rather than places we go to mourn someone’s passing, places we go to celebrate their lives. I take that on board; maybe with that QR code we can do something for the VC winners as well to make sure that we can identify them.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer again to page 779. The member for Midland grieved to the minister last week about the issue of the Swan Animal Haven. Given that the minister undertook to look closely at finding the haven an alternative site, what is the actual timetable for the Swan Animal Haven to vacate its lease because of the cemeteries board’s demand for extra space?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The Swan Animal Haven has had a lease now for a number of years. It was extended back in 2003 and 2013, and it was then made clear that that would be the last time the lease would be extended. As the population of the metropolitan area increases, the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board will need every bit of land it has been allocated, and possibly more. The Swan Animal Haven does some fantastic work and, as was identified in the previous division, the government gives it money each year to support companion animals. After the member for Midland’s grievance, I met with members of the group and had a chat with them. What appears to have happened is a classic example of the group realising that it does not have secure tenure, but no-one is leading the charge for it. I gave a commitment that I would talk to the Minister for Planning and Perth Airport to see whether we can find a better location. I would like the organisation to have guaranteed tenure of land, which would be a perfect outcome, given that leasehold is not perfect. We have to work together to find a solution. If we can find a solution, I am sure we can talk to the MCB to get an extension of the lease, if we need one, but we have to start making inroads into trying to resolve this issue. The haven has a current lease until January 2019, and hopefully before then we will have found a place for it to go. Unfortunately, an animal haven is not the sort of place everyone likes next door. It works well where it is situated now, between an airport and a cemetery. Barking dogs do not affect anybody. That is the kind of area in which we are trying to find access.

The CHAIRMAN: That completes the examination.

Meeting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm