

**Division 35: Department of Communities — Services 1 to 6, Youth, \$1 072 681 000 —**

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr D.J. Kelly, Minister for Youth.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Mr M. Crevola, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms C. Irwin, Assistant Director General, Strategy and Partnerships.

Ms L. Kalasopatan, Assistant Director, Management Accounting.

Mr L. Clarke, Chief of Staff, Minister for Youth.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* 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 close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I note for the benefit of the chamber that the member for Cottesloe is attending remotely. The member for Cottesloe is not a member of the committee but is able to participate, as all members are. Hopefully, the technology goes smoothly, but just bear with me as we go.

Are there any questions? The Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I think, minister, we will probably spend about 15 minutes on this division and then move to water, if that is okay. I am just giving a heads-up for whomever is coming in next.

I refer to the impact of COVID on young people and the *Beyond 2020—WA youth action plan*, which is paragraph 25 on page 524 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. Perhaps the minister could tell us a little bit about the plan and what funding has been applied to implement said plan.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** Sorry, I did not catch the last part of that question.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** What funding has been applied to implement said plan?

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** “The” plan.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** “The” plan.

**The CHAIR:** Can I get a page number, Leader of the Opposition?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is paragraph 25 on page 524 of budget paper No 2, volume 2.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** The plan is something that my predecessor had worked upon and I was very happy to complete it when I came into the portfolio. The plan revolves around a number of major themes that were identified, including elevating the voice of young people within government; helping young people reach their potential; assisting young people to gain employment; climate change, which came through pretty strongly; mental health and wellbeing, and finding a secure place to live, which were obviously key issues; and providing help when help is needed most. Some of the initiatives that we have put in place as part of that plan include raising the voice for young people. My predecessor put in place the Ministerial Youth Advisory Council, and one of the initiatives we undertook was to make board membership a paid position. It was an advisory position originally when it was established. That matter was raised by the young people on the panel. They said it was great to be on the council, but asked why they were not remunerated in the same way members of other boards were, so we implemented that.

The Ministerial Youth Advisory Council worked on the issue of discrimination against members of the LGBTQIA+ community. One of the recommendations from that work was that the government should fund an advocacy group for young members of that community. As a direct result of that, we have entered into a three-year funding agreement with the Youth Pride Network, providing it with \$120 000 per annum. Up until that point, that group had been a voluntary organisation that worked under the auspices of the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia. This is its first round of funding, which has enabled it to get a number of part-time staff. It has already produced one piece

of work on discrimination against young members of that community in relation to homelessness services. As far as raising the voice of young people goes, they are two government initiatives. I am also aware that the Department of Education, through Minister Ellery—it is not directly my responsibility—has formed the WA Student Council to advise her on student issues. I think it comprises year 10 students.

They are a couple of things that we have entered into that were identified in the first part of that plan. I could go through them all, but we have only 15 minutes. Young people are very passionate about climate change. The initial climate change fund in last year's budget was allocated \$750 million and I think in this year's budget we have increased that funding to over \$1 billion. That is action that we are taking to address climate change generally, but, in particular, it is one of the issues that young people told us they wanted us to take action on.

On the issue of mental health and wellbeing, through the Minister for Health, a ministerial task force has looked at the provision of mental health services in the state for people aged between zero and 18 years. That report has been handed to the government. I think in this budget something like \$40 million will be provided initially to respond to those recommendations. Obviously, much more will be needed to implement the changes that are being made. They are some of the initiatives that we have funded and put in place that are consistent with that report.

One of the other initiatives that the Leader of the Opposition might be interested in and that I am pleased about is the provision of \$200 000 for specific COVID recovery grants. We provided \$202 000 in youth recovery grants to 31 organisations during 2020 and 2021. At least one round of that funding was aimed at assisting young people around employment and mental health issues relating to COVID. That is something we did. Another initiative I will mention is the Home Stretch campaign, which the Youth Affairs Council of WA and people in the sector have been campaigning a long time for. Up until the implementation of that decision by this government, once a person in care reached 18, they ceased to have any support. We funded a trial that was run by Anglicare for 12 months, I think. We have now budgeted to permanently provide funding for young people in care up to the age of 21 if they choose to continue in that system. They are a couple of the things that we have funded.

[4.40 pm]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I note that the action plan runs from 2020 to 2022. Will there be another plan? Are you working on that?

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** We are considering the best way to respond from here on in. These plans involve a lot of consultation. There was a lot of face-to-face consultation in the lead up to the first plan, which was the first one that government has done. With the COVID pandemic, we have not been in a position to repeat that consultation process. One of the things on the agenda is to talk to the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia about whether it thinks there should be a new action plan or something else in a different format. At this point, I have not made a decision. Primarily, we have not done that consultation because of COVID and I would not make that decision without doing that consultation.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is there funding in the budget to allow the department to undertake any of those activities or would that have to be a separate —

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** Most of that consultation was done prior to me coming into the portfolio. I could be wrong but I think that that consultation was done using the department's existing resources. I would not envisage there being additional funding, but, again, it depends on what form that consultation takes.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Has the plan been operating on a calendar year or financial year, or is it just a loose, two-year plan?

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** I do not think it has a hard and fast beginning and end date.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** When does the minister see himself making a decision about what will happen?

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** I could not tell the member. To be honest, given COVID and the variabilities, we have not got a time line on when to make a decision on whether there will be a new action plan or something in a different form. Given the uncertainties of COVID, that has not been possible. I have put in place regular meetings with the Youth Affairs Council; I think my next one will be in a couple of weeks and that will be one of the issues I will be talking to it about. These plans are good for government to do but they also have to be useful for the sector. I want to make sure that we are not doing another plan for its own sake. I want to make sure it is meaningful for the sector as well.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I have one further question on this division and then we can move on. How will the department measure or wrap up the end of this plan? How will the effectiveness of the current plan be measured?

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** The current plan has so many different initiatives—mental health, homelessness—that I am not sure it would be worthwhile to come up with a metric that gives us a net result at the end of all those. Obviously, each of those in the mental health budget portfolio will have processes to determine whether what they are doing is successful, and likewise in the homelessness portfolio. I do not think it would be a good use of my time or the

department's resources to try to cut across all those to do a single assessment. I suppose that each of those areas will stand and fall on their own.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is hard to understand whether it is a worthwhile activity if there is no measurement of the activity.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** The department will look at it and consult with the Youth Affairs Council to see whether it thought it was useful. As I said, my understanding is that this is the first time that the state government has attempted this. It was not something that was tackled when the member was in government. Before we embark upon an assessment that would, by definition, have to cut across a whole bunch of different portfolios, I want to talk to the Youth Affairs Council and get its read on the best way forward.

**The appropriation was recommended.**