

Division 75: Child Protection and Family Support, \$583 584 000 —

Mr P. Abetz, Chairman.

Ms A.R. Mitchell, Minister for Child Protection.

Ms E. White, Director General.

Mr P. Byrne, Executive Director, Community and Business Services.

Mrs P. Beamish Burton, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms A. Gadsdon, Acting Executive Director, Policy and Learning.

Ms J. Dixon, Acting Executive Director, Aboriginal Engagement and Coordination.

Mr A.S. Gaspar, Chief of Staff, Office of the Minister for Child Protection.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

It is the intention of the Chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. It will greatly assist Hansard if members can give these details in preface to their question.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information she agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by Friday, 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 Kwinana.

Mr R.H. COOK: Thank you, Chair. I want to unpack some of the overall headline figures and get some clarification from the minister about some of the budgetary changes. To kick things off, the total appropriation in the 2015–16 budget was \$579.7 million. However, in the 2016–17 budget, the estimated actual is \$569.5 million, which is essentially an underspend of about \$10 million. The appropriation amount versus the cost of services is sometimes a little bit confusing but I wonder whether the minister can clarify why we have the discrepancy.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will ask the director general of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support to respond.

Ms E. White: Thank you. I will ask my team to source the particulars but, in a general sense, right across 2015–16 and into 2016–17, the total figure is adjusted according to the annual review of the demand model. For example, in 2016–17 there has been an increase. Through the budget cycle and the review process, the total demand that the model forecast was still an increase of five per cent but the demand was increasing at a lower rate. Those figures were recast to reflect the demand model review. One reason for that is the reduced population growth in Western Australia over those years. Also, of course, the specific figures for 2015–16 that the member referred to reflects the reduction of financial counselling going over to the Department of Local Government and Communities. That is the main one.

[10.50 am]

Mr R.H. COOK: I understand that the transfer to the Department of Local Government and Communities accounts for \$3.6 million. Surely the director general is not saying that demand for child protection services has dropped off to the extent that therefore justifies a \$7 million reduction in appropriations or activity?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: As the director general indicated, when the department goes to Treasury for funds, it is based on what the department expects it will require. There has been a reduction in the service; even though there has been an increase in the service, there was a reduction in what was expected. Those changes are reflected in the figures that the member sees in front of him. I will ask the director general whether she wishes to add any more to that.

Ms E. White: I will add a clarifying statement that the total amount has been removed. The figure for 2015–16 has been restated as though it was never in the budget. It is not a scaling down; it is from taking away the

original forecasted dollar figure and then putting the new one in as a result of the demand model review for the year.

Mr R.H. COOK: Is the director general suggesting that she is afraid staff will be standing around, leaning on the water cooler, bored for something to do, in the area of child protection? Is that really the suggestion?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: No, definitely not, but, at the same time, if money is not required for the service at the level that might have been expected, Treasury does not give us that money for people to stand around the water cooler and not do anything.

Mr R.H. COOK: As members of Parliament, it is constantly drawn to our attention just how overworked the minister's department is and how underserved the area of child protection is—not necessarily through any fault of the minister's, but simply because of the challenges our community faces. I am staggered that the suggestion is that demand has actually dropped off.

Given that that amount of financial stress in our community has gone up, I assume the circumstances in which people are living has not eased off and I assume that business is booming in the area of child protection. Is it being suggested that the system is humming along and not struggling to deal with the demand for services?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: If I could just clarify that statement, we did not say that demand has gone down; we said that demand has gone up, but demand has not gone up by the proportion that was originally expected when money was sought from Treasury. Demand has gone up, and, yes, we are not always happy about that. I can assure the member that our staff are very committed to the work that they do. They have a good level of caseload work, but at the same time, if the amount of demand is not of the size that was originally thought, that is the difference in funds we are talking about.

Mr R.H. COOK: In the 2015–16 budget, the total cost of services was listed as \$643.1 million and in this year's budget, the total estimated actual for cost of services is \$630.8 million. That is a reduction of \$13 million. If we consider that \$3.6 million of that was for the transfer across to the Department of Local Government and Communities, do we not essentially have a cut of nearly \$10 million in the allocation or activity over the last year in the operations of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Before I pass on to the director general for specifics, can I just remind the member that we have had a continued increase in funding to the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. There has been about an 82 per cent increase since 2008, so we have made a sizeable investment into the Department for Child Protection and Family Support.

Mr R.H. COOK: I am not talking about since 2008; I am talking about the last 12 months. The budget has been significantly underspent.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will ask the director general to respond to that.

Ms E. White: There have been some changes in the cost and demand model that have resulted in a reduction going forward. It is not a cut to our total funding per se, but it is a reduction in the forward estimates. In 2016–17, there is an \$8.5 million reduction and in 2017–18, there is a \$5.49 million reduction. There is a total reduction in demand of \$2.734 million from 2016–17 to 2019–20. On an annual basis, that demand model will be reviewed to ensure that there have not been any changes upward, forwards or backwards in that model. As I mentioned, there have been changes in how the demand model has been applied to our future demand and subsequent budget. In working with the Department of Treasury through the budget process, our department has agreed to review the demand model over the next 12 months. There have been some changes to both our legislative and policy settings. For example, the changes to the Children and Community Services Act that were proclaimed on 1 January define emotional abuse as a significant contributor to family and domestic violence in quite a specific way that has not been there previously. That will feature in the review of the demand model in the next 12 months.

Mr R.H. COOK: There is a reduction in the total cost of services of \$14 million—roughly \$14 million; I think it is \$13.8 million—between 2016–17 and 2017–18. That is only partially explained by the transfer across to the financial counselling services. Why has there been such a drastic cut in funding for some of our most vulnerable citizens in Western Australia?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: The director general has some more specific information that she will be pleased to provide.

Ms E. White: The team has been able to locate some of those specifics. Some of the reductions the member is pointing to from 2015–16 to 2016–17 were reductions in the salaries budget resulting from the public sector workforce renewal policy. There was a reduction through the one per cent efficiency dividend, which was originally cast at 1.5 per cent and then reviewed and reset at one per cent. There was a reduction due to a corrective measure for non-salary expenditure, there was a depreciation of funding due to fully appreciated

assets and there has been a decrease in the hardship utility grant scheme component of financial counselling, again based on the annual review done to project future demand.

Mr R.H. COOK: Cuts.

Dr A.D. BUTI: In answer to the member for Kwinana's question, the minister said that demand has gone up, but not as much as was expected or forecast by Treasury. Could the minister, either now or by way of supplementary information, provide us with the Treasury information in respect of the fact that demand was forecast to be X, but it has ended up not being X?

[11.00 am]

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: No, we would need to provide that as supplementary information. We will provide the difference between the Treasury forecast and the actual demand.

[*Supplementary Information No A67.*]

Mr D.J. KELLY: I draw the minister's attention to the hardship utility grant scheme figures under "Spending Changes" on page 866. Savings of \$1.2 million were achieved in 2015–16 by HUGS. What is the full summary of changes to the program that allowed this to be achieved? How many people applied for HUGS in 2015–16, split between water and electricity? How many people were granted access to HUGS funding in 2015–16 to date?

[Mr I.M. Britza took the chair.]

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will address the first part of the question while we find the specific information that the member is seeking. The actual number of hardship utility grant scheme applications in 2015–16 was lower than forecast. That means that, as a result, the anticipated expenditure has obviously decreased. We have some of the detail that the member is looking for concerning the break-up of the applications for the utilities. I invite the director general to respond to the member on that matter.

Ms E. White: The total number of hardship utility grant scheme grants throughout 2015–16 was 23 176. That equates to a total dollar amount of \$8 846 141. In response to the member's specific requests on the total number of grants relating to water, I will have to break them down into three lots—Water Corporation, Aqwest and Busselton Water. The total number of applications across that—I must apologise; I am giving the member 2014–15 figures. I will refer to 2015–16.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Ms White can give us those as well, if she likes.

Ms E. White: For Water Corporation, the total number of HUGS applications in 2014–15 was 1 468. For Aqwest, the total number of applications was 13. For Busselton Water, the total number of applications was 10.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Was Ms White going to give us the figures for electricity as well, and then 2015–16 so far?

Ms E. White: Yes. The total number of HUGS applications for electricity in 2014–15 was 1 572. For Synergy, it was 14 375. Those two combined is the figure for electricity. For 2015–16, the total number of applications for HUGS was 12 955. The total dollar amount was \$5 200 338. I will give the member the figures for HUGS applications for water, again in three parts. The total number of applications for Water Corporation was 952. The total number for Aqwest was 14. For Busselton Water, it was six. For Synergy, the number of applications was 6 402 and for Horizon Power, it was 864.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Is that 2015–16 to date?

Ms E. White: To February 2016.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The minister said that the number of HUGS applications in the last financial year was lower than expected. Have there been any changes in the process for applying to HUGS that could explain the reduction in applicants?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Member, it is easier for the applicant because they go straight to the utility now to make their application for assistance. It is easier for the applicants; it is not more difficult, so that is the change.

Mr D.J. KELLY: What is the minister's assessment of why there have been a lower number of applicants?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: One would assume that people are not using as much electricity in the electricity market as they once were. People are tending to make a judgement call. I think everybody, not only people who are suffering hardship, are thinking about how often they leave lights on or leave other things going, and that is a tremendous thing; we all want that and I think everyone is doing that. I certainly think about that and I am sure most people are thinking in the same way. I commend people for doing that, because it makes it easier for everyone.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Certainly the feedback I am getting from financial counsellors is that people are finding it more and more difficult to pay their water and electricity bills. I wonder whether the minister has any evidence base to explain the reduction or it is just the minister's feeling or vibe.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: No; I am going by the number of applications that we received. The member asked for an opinion, so I have given my opinion.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Is it possible to provide through supplementary information a breakdown by postcode and suburb of the numbers that the minister has given us?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: We might have it here. Just give us a couple of moments to locate it.

Mr D.J. KELLY: There are a lot of postcodes. We would be happy if the minister provided it by way of supplementary information.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: We have it by region, but the member wishes for us to provide it by supplementary information. I am confirming that the member wants the number of applications.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The number of applications and the number granted by postcode and suburb.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: We can do both those—granted and applications by suburb.

[*Supplementary Information No A68.*]

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I refer the minister to page 867 of the *Budget Statements* and the first dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, which states that Aboriginal children comprise 53 per cent of the children in care. That obviously implies that this cohort is huge and that the demand increases the strain on the services available. Can the minister explain what is being done, because the budget states —

Earlier and more targeted family support intervention is needed to address this and reduce the current level of demand ...

Can the minister tell us how the government will do that?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: The number of Aboriginal children in care is alarming and it is certainly something that we are very cognisant of addressing. I want to make the comment that most Aboriginal families in Western Australia raise their children in very safe and secure environments and are not included in this cohort that we are specifically targeting here. I think it should also be acknowledged that not all Aboriginal families are in this situation, but it is true that some sections of our community struggle to bring their children up in a safe environment. It is often due to family and domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health issues—all of those things. It is only at the very end of that time, because we want to improve the situation for families at risk. It is not just about the child—even though it is very much about the child. The department also wants to target its work at families so it can help parents and other family members in that situation. It is a whole-of-family approach, not just a situation in which a child is immediately taken into care. The first plan is to keep the family together; the second plan, if a child has to be taken out, is to reunite that family. If, and only if, that cannot be achieved, the child will be taken into the care of the director general of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. Relatives and kinship people will always be used to assist with the development of that child because the connection to culture is very important. We have some specific programs. I will ask the director general to comment on those that are specific to Aboriginal children.

[11.10 am]

Ms E. White: To build on the answer to date regarding the earlier intervention and family support strategy, it lands in three parts. A discussion paper has been out for consultation since February. The department has been quite overwhelmed with responses from not only government and non-government agencies, but also Aboriginal-controlled agencies and other groups. The three parts of the strategy really focus all our effort, both internal to the department and with our partners in the community services sector, on targeting a decrease in the rate of Aboriginal children entering care. That requires some collaborative, co-design processes. The support the department offers families in strife, who are most likely to come into either the child protection system or the youth justice system, really needs to be quite specifically designed and delivered to meet their particular needs. We are looking at the second part, which is strengthening the service sector. That links to a number of other reforms that the department is undertaking, such as the out-of-home-care reform, but also improving some of the governance of the structures, such as our family support network. We have a number operating in the metropolitan area and we are trialling different models in the regions. We are seeing how we can partner more instructively with other government agencies on the spend of services targeting families who have a number of these factors. A critical part is developing individualised, more flexible funding arrangements for families and developing a shared outcomes framework that all state government agencies, and our community sector partners,

can ascribe to. An example of those outcomes would be a reduction in the number of children coming into care and a reduction in the number of family and domestic violence incidents. That work is in development.

The department has been quite assertively reviewing and redeveloping a number of existing services, including some of the contracted services in the family support and family preservation area. Some of that review is looking at how well they are doing or what are the outcomes for the Aboriginal families that they connect with. Also, what proportion of Aboriginal families access that service in the meantime? As the minister suggested, a raft of other things are happening across the department that is very much about having a positive impact on the lives of Aboriginal people and reducing the number of children coming into care. I will provide a couple of quick examples. The department has been running a pilot project called Getting Ready. It is a pre-birth planning process for vulnerable or at-risk mothers early on in their pregnancy. Quite a collaborative and intensive process is undertaken with the mother and father, and the extended family network. It is quite a formal protocol between the department, King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women, Kaleeya Hospital and all the other birthing hospitals across the state. Through that process, the department quite proactively, and very early on in the pregnancy, tries to assist and facilitate support to the mother not only through her pregnancy, but also after birth so that the baby can go home to a safe environment. That project has been about working quite specifically with vulnerable Aboriginal mothers.

An intensive family support housing program has been running throughout the last 12 months. This program is really working with families who have children at risk of entering care following an eviction from a Housing Authority property. Traditionally, many of these families are at the end of the road. It is very much a child protection intervention. The department has six houses across the Perth metropolitan area. The Housing Authority has just confirmed a further six homes being made available for this program. It is a very intensive program. Families need to commit to a raft of responsibilities before entering the program, but of course there is a lot of support and incentives in the program. Some of the strict conditions include income management, liquor-restricted premises and agreeing to have quite intensive family support in the home for up to six hours. To date, the program has prevented 11 children from coming into care as a result of its intensity. Only Aboriginal families have engaged in and entered that program. I am quite pleased to report that in one family's situation, the department is in the process of returning two children who have been in the department's care for some time.

Another important strategy the department is really pursuing is around developing the Aboriginal community-controlled organisation strategy. That is about developing more productive, focused partnerships with a range of Aboriginal-controlled agencies right across the state, engaging them, when they are interested and available to do so, in some of our decision-making and design processes, but potentially for some becoming service providers in the area of child protection and family support. There is probably more; shall I keep going?

The CHAIRMAN: I think we have a further question.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have a question following on from the member for Eyre. I refer to "Responsible Parenting Services" at page 870 of the *Budget Statements*. It seems that the funding for responsible parenting services is being slashed. The 2015–16 budget allocation was \$27.694 million and in 2016–17 it has been reduced to \$22.079 million. That is a reduction of \$5.65 million. The notation at the bottom of the page advises that the services will be transitioned into the department's earlier intervention and family support strategy. Can the minister advise why funding has been severely reduced, by her own figures, and also advise which service delivery area the earlier intervention and family support strategy is delivered from?

The CHAIRMAN: Before the minister answers the question, member, the previous question was about Aboriginal children.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, but it went on to refer to responsible parenting services.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I missed that. Sorry, minister; I just wanted to clarify that.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: It was a very curved ball, but it was very relevant. I am very happy to respond to that one as well.

The responsible parenting project had two components to it—Best Beginnings and parent support. Both were very effective and were achieving a lot. Best Beginnings picked up children aged zero to six and parent support picked up children after that age. The work continues so that when a child gets to six years of age, they are not told, "Sorry, we'll finish with you now and send you off somewhere else." Two separate programs under that banner was probably the most effective way to do it. It was great programming but not as effective as it could have been. Invariably, that merged and continues. At the same time we must always look to see the best way forward. That is why the department has been very proactive in working out the best way to go. The member for Armadale would be very familiar with a number of family support networks in his electorate.

The focus is on early intervention—making a difference at the start rather than waiting for children to be at the point of needing to go into care. This early intervention strategy picks up the best of both programs and adds to it, and we will see further expansion. With the early intervention strategies, we are working much closer with non-government agencies because the combination of the two makes a significant difference in how things are done. The member may be seeing some reduction because others are picking up more of the workload. The Department for Child Protection and Family Support is working very closely with the non-government sector to make sure we get the best outcomes. I will ask the director general to make a couple of other specific comments on that change.

[11.20 am]

Ms E. White: The department has always delivered responsible parenting services through both parent support and Best Beginnings. In 2010 we were successful in getting some temporary funding through royalties for regions to extend the programs through to the Murchison, the great southern, the goldfields, the Pilbara, the wheatbelt and the south west. It was always temporary funding. The member was alluding to a funded two-year transition period in the budget whereby in the third year we will no longer receive the royalties for regions component for responsible parenting. We are maintaining our consolidated account budget for responsible parenting, albeit at a reduced rate, which we will recast, implement and focus in accordance with the early intervention family support strategy. They will operate statewide, as they have done in the last six years, and they will be integrated into some of the other services the department delivers, such as child centre family support, family support and Strong Families, within a more integrated early intervention family support team. As has always been suggested, part of the strategy is looking across the service system at how we can create better linkage and governance in identification of families who most need this and whose children are most at risk of coming into care and how we can link with community sector agencies as part of that overall service capacity.

Dr A.D. BUTI: What regional areas will be affected by the funding cuts? Where are the 41 positions located that were funded in 2015–16 and will disappear in 2016–17?

Ms E. White: The six regions funded specifically out of the royalties for regions dollars were the Murchison, including the midwest and the Gascoyne; the great southern; the goldfields; the Pilbara; the wheatbelt; and the south west. The other 11 districts across Western Australia have been fully funded. Because this was temporary funding, particularly in the last two years, we took the view that we would not appoint permanent staff. They have been delivering the service with a combination of permanent staff and staff on fixed-term contracts. We also have a large number of vacancies right across the state in responsible parenting. We are taking a statewide view on the reallocation rather than a location allocation because our ultimate goal is to have the integrated service front about preventing children going into care.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I refer to the dot point on page 867 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” that deals with domestic violence, which reads in part —

Increased community awareness and less acceptance of family and domestic violence has also led to a significant growth in reports to the Department.

In 2014–15, there was a 29 per cent increase in the number of reports compared with the number in the previous year. I have a series of questions, but the first question is: can the minister provide details of those reports by postcode and suburb—by supplementary information, I suppose?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Subject to certain issues of privacy, we can provide some information that I think will give the member what he is looking for, but I request that he not go into too much detail after that.

Ms E. White: I will need to check with WA Police. We received those reports from WA Police and it may have a more detailed postcode analysis than we do.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you happy with that, member?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: Can we confirm what the department will provide?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: We will provide domestic violence incidents by postcode. What is the time line for that, given we may have to go elsewhere to get some of that information?

The CHAIRMAN: The official date is 3 June.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: That might be difficult.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can we take a commitment that the minister will provide it as supplementary information, but if it cannot be done in that time, she will provide it later?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Mr Chairman, am I allowed to operate that way?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes. I think that is pretty good.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: We will endeavour to do that by 3 June, but, if not, we will get it to the member as soon as possible and will contact him to let him know.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Thank you very much, minister.

[Supplementary Information No A69.]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can the minister provide a list of the service names and amounts that each agency receives to deliver domestic violence services?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: We will see whether we can get it for the member straightaway. The allocation will be well used and I am very proud of what the services that we support and work with do. I was certainly pleased to open the new refuge at Ellenbrook last week. The model of service out there provides both refuge accommodation and supported home programs. The safe at home and domestic violence outreach does not always mean that there is a refuge. Going forward, we have a focus for how we will address domestic violence, and that means not only when it reaches the reportable stage, but also working on prevention and changing men's behaviour. We have a focus that probably has not been brought forward as much as we would like. In addition, we will be working with the commonwealth, which has a \$100 million package to enhance women's safety. It is a combination of work. I am very appreciative of our non-government agencies. The director general will inform the member.

Ms E. White: Is the member's request to outline the individual agencies funded through the department's budget and their location?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Ms E. White: The Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service provides the family and domestic violence accommodation support services in the east corridor at the Wooree Miya Aboriginal Women's Refuge, funded to a total of \$628 659. It services the broad Perth metropolitan area but is located in the east corridor. Anglicare WA has funding of \$556 020, which delivers the Albany Women's Centre. In Carnarvon, family support services are funded to a total of \$564 676, which provide the Gascoyne Women's Refuge. Crisis Support Services Inc is funded to \$578 480 and funds the Crisis House Women's Refuge. The City of Stirling receives \$561 465, which provides the family and domestic violence accommodation and support services through the north corridor at the Stirling Women's Refuge.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can I interrupt briefly. If it is a long list, maybe the department can provide the list rather than the director general reading through it all now.

Ms E. White: Would the total be helpful?

The CHAIRMAN: Is the member happy with supplementary information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes; it will save a bit of time.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you confirm what you will provide?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will provide the list of agencies with the amount of money they receive to support family and domestic violence services.

[Supplementary Information No A70.]

[11.30 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think the minister may want to provide this answer by way of supplementary information as well, but it is up to her. What is the annual budget of the department's Family and Domestic Violence Unit; how many staff are employed; what are their positions; and how does the unit actually operate?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will ask the director general to comment on that.

Ms E. White: Just while the team sources the actual full-time equivalent numbers, I will provide some explanation. The role of the unit has a couple of layers, the first being on behalf of the state and the Minister for Child Protection to coordinate the state plan for family and domestic violence. It is a coordination and support role because it involves many government departments and many bodies within the community services sector. It also provides linkages and support, and does work on behalf of the state with regard to the national plan. It works quite extensively in a learning and development quality assurance support role with the work that the Department for Child Protection and Family Support delivers in the area of child protection. It also has the function of doing the Ombudsman's fatality reviews, including the case reviews and the detailed follow-ups. As an example, it provides a range of linkages and supports to the National Research Agenda to Reduce Violence against Women. It sources, on behalf of the state, from the department and other relevant departments, a lot of data that works in with the data linkage programs in the area. It coordinates and supports the range of governance committees in the area of family and domestic violence—most recently, the Family and Domestic

Violence Governance Council, which is a director general-level committee that also includes the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services Inc, Victims of Crime and Legal Aid. It is about high-level cross-government coordination and overall service system development. There is also a very active senior officers' group that, again, reflects the membership of that governance committee, and many, many working groups that sit underneath that. For example, one of the working groups is really focusing on support and accountability for perpetrators of violence and what needs to be done at a policy service system level to take us forward in that area.

As members can hear, the actual function is quite multi-layered. The total budget of the Family and Domestic Violence Unit is \$1 458 000 for 2015–16. With regard to the FTEs, the unit has a total funded allocation of six FTEs.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 866 of budget paper No 2 and the line item “Kimberley Regional Initiative” in the table headed “Spending Changes”. Could the minister outline what that actually is? There is not much documentation to give me an understanding of what that initiative might be. I assume it is mainly to do with government support for the Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley, but I would like a bit more detail.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will start with some information and get the director general to provide some specific information. We have quite a focus on the Kimberley region and that is appropriate because we have some very sad situations in that area, and it is very important to try to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of the women, children and men living in the Kimberley. We have to do that both separately and collectively, because our whole aim is to reduce the incidence of family and domestic violence in the area. The other thing that is very important about the Kimberley initiative is that it must also be grounded in Aboriginal lore and culture because we need to make those changes through their behaviour, and we do that with their culture. It is an important part of this area. Once again, our department has to work with Western Australia Police, the Department of Corrective Services and specialist family and domestic violence services. This is very much an integrated process, and we are finding that integration is working much more effectively than one department going out and doing one thing, and someone else doing something else. It is very much an integrated service to have this matter attended to. I think the director general has some specific examples of that, so I will hand over to her.

Ms E. White: The “Safer Families, Safer Communities: Kimberley Family Violence Regional Plan 2015–2020”, launched last October, is the first aspect of the plan. As the minister mentioned, a range of things are happening under that plan. About 15 priorities were identified through community consultation. Other aspects of the broader plan include a joint response between the department and WA Police to child abuse. This is referred to as the “Kimberley Joint Response”, and it comprises part of that plan. It is about all child abuse, but it is quite specifically about child sexual abuse. There is a very proactive community awareness-raising aspect of that plan for both professionals in the region and community members. There is a heavy focus on youth and vulnerable people engagement in terms of them being able to be facilitated to access support if required, but also, if they are in unsafe situations, being well equipped to work out where to go. The third part of the plan is quite well supported interagency training and skills development. That is specifically about strengthening mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse in the region. It is an interagency training group composed of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, the Department of Health, WA Police and, where possible, significant Aboriginal leaders, elders and professionals in the area. The training group links very closely with those on the ground to deliver that training. For example, we have had about 600 people through that training statewide, and we are hoping to really intensify that in the Kimberley.

To explain what it looks like on the ground, we have recruited additional staff to deliver the Kimberley plan; that includes a team leader, two senior child protection workers and Aboriginal field staff as part of that Kimberley joint response. With specific reference to what it looks like on the ground as an increased footprint in the family and domestic violence area, it has been several-fold. We have established child safety teams across the region, including in Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Kununurra and Wyndham, and those teams have responsibility for the surrounding communities. Through royalties for regions money and in partnership with the Department of the Attorney General, we have been able to increase the resources available for male perpetrator change programs in the region. As the minister mentioned, Dr Victoria Hovane's consultancy has been engaged to look at what service delivery models need to come from a better understanding regarding community, culture and lore, and how we can build on them in our service delivery response for better outcomes.

Mr R.H. COOK: I refer to page 872 of budget paper No 2 and the subheading “Working with Children Checks”. I remind the minister of the 2014 Auditor General's report on the Working with Children Screening Unit. I am conscious of the fact that the number of checks that have been undertaken continues to increase, but the number of staff has remained constant and steady since that report came out. I am wondering whether the minister can explain what steps the department has taken to increase resourcing and respond to the recommendations of the 2014 Auditor General's report.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: That is very good timing; I was at the unit yesterday, discussing how it works and what it is achieving. I have to take this opportunity to commend the staff at the Working with Children Screening Unit for the wonderful work they do. Those roles have changed over time; it is no longer just an application process and a yes-or-no tick schedule; it is very much involved in checking out the risk that might be involved. Yes, some are simple—tick, and off they go; others take a lot more work. The unit has done an amazing job in refining how it operates. This year, after only 10 years in operation, the unit will issue its one-millionth working with children card. The unit has been very smart in ensuring that applications are processed as quickly as possible. In some cases, the unit needs to do an extensive investigation to work out what the risks are, and that will require more time, but that further investigation is very important because we want to make sure that we reduce the risks for children. In the 10 years in which the unit has been in operation, the time taken to complete a straightforward application has reduced from 28 days to four days. The unit has a fantastic group of people, and they are doing an amazing job. As I have said, this year the unit will issue its one-millionth working with children card, and there is now a lot more respect for, and understanding of, that process. The director general might be able to provide a more specific answer.

[11.40 am]

Ms E. White: I will give two updates that are of relevance to the Auditor General's report. One of the Auditor General's recommendations was that a more comprehensive data system for working with children cards be implemented that will enable more expedited and accurate reporting. We have now implemented the screening applications assessment management system, or SAAM. That system has been in operation for close to 12 months and is achieving the outcome with regard to providing more detailed reporting in real time and so forth. With regard to resources, the implementation of SAAM has improved our ability to do that work by removing the need for manual reporting and the like. We have put on temporary additional full-time equivalents, who are currently still in the unit, to assist us with some of the improvements that the minister has touched on.

Mr R.H. COOK: Those additional FTEs are not reflected in the budget; so, if this is happening, could the minister provide the updated number of FTEs? Since 2014–15, the number of FTEs in the unit has remained steady at 49, so it would be great to get some clarity around that.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will go to the director general for that.

Ms E. White: The number of FTEs has stayed the same, but we have put on temporary FTEs, which is why that does not appear in the budget.

Mr R.H. COOK: The Auditor General also made a recommendation with regard to the assessments for applicants who have been convicted of a class 1 offence. In one instance, it took four months, or more, to complete the check. In one-quarter of the cases reviewed by the Auditor General in which monitoring had identified new criminal record information about cardholders, it took longer than four months to issue an interim or negative notice, and in one case it took 14 months. I gather some of this is due to the failure to have good communication with WA Police. Indeed, one of the observations made by the Auditor General was about the reliance on national criminal records. Can the minister update us on what the unit has done to improve that aspect of its work?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: This was one of the discussions that I had with the staff yesterday. I totally support them in saying that there is no reason to worry about the time frame when we are making a decision about keeping children safe.

Mr R.H. COOK: It is actually the other way around—people are continuing to work with children while the background check is being done.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: That applies in some cases and not in others. I am sure I am not using the right terminology; I will get that in a moment. If there is any risk at all, the person will not be allowed to continue to work with children. However, unfortunately, some people who have been given a negative notice or have been asked not to work with children will not comply and will try to continue to work with children while the decision is being made, and those situations always take time to work through. I will ask the director general to respond to the Auditor General's observations

Ms E. White: In all organisations, the screening that is involved with working with children cards is only one of the many safeguards that they should have in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children. As has been indicated, the timeliness of dealing with applications is impacted by a range of things. A substantial amount of case law is involved in working with children. If an applicant has been convicted in Tasmania of a class 1 offence, we may need to go to Tasmania to look at the court transcripts, because sometimes the charges are changed as a result of the trial process, and that may take a great deal of time. However, that is important so that we can understand the immediate, medium and long-term risk to children. The working with children unit works closely with the organisations that do the screening. When a negative notice is issued to a person who is in a job, that needs to be backed up with evidence that will stand up to the review mechanisms available to all the

parties in that process. Therefore, it is critical on a range of fronts that before we issue a notice, we get the necessary evidence. The Auditor General's report highlighted one or two instances in which the time frame was quite extensive.

Mr R.H. COOK: How many people currently have a working with children card; and what is the current rejection rate or negative outcome for the issue of such a card?

Ms E. White: This figure is as of 31 March 2016. The total number of cards issued in Western Australia is 92 139. We rejected 495 applications, and 444 applications were withdrawn halfway through the screening process.

Mr R.H. COOK: Just to clarify, the Auditor General's report states that over 300 000 people in Western Australia have had a working with children check. The director general just said that the number is 92 000.

Ms E. White: Just to correct myself, this is for 2015–16.

Mr R.H. COOK: What is the total number across the state?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: We will take that as a supplementary, just to make sure we get the right answer for the number of working with children cards in Western Australia.

[Supplementary Information No A71.]

[11.50 am]

Mr D.J. KELLY: I take the minister to page 870, "Homelessness Services". I understand that in the annual report for the department for 2014-15, the number of homelessness services clients was 21 400. The budget papers state that the actual number of clients for that year was 13 819. That is in footnote (b) to "Homelessness Services". Can the minister explain the difference between the figure in the annual report of 21 400 and the figure that appears in the budget papers of 13 800? Is there an explanation for that?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: We are just getting that detail. The information I have received is that refugees are also included in those numbers, which come through domestic violence.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Sorry, the figures in the annual report include refugees?

Ms E. White: Refuges.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Sorry, refuges.

Mr D.J. KELLY: So that accounts for the difference of 8 000 people. Okay. For 2015–16, the budget papers appear to show an underspend of \$700 000 in the estimated actual amount. What is the reason for this underspend, given that homelessness has been listed as a significant issue affecting the agency for a number of years?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I am just getting that information from the appropriate staff member.

Ms E. White: The variance is between 2015–16 and 2016–17. I just want to clarify the question: is the member wondering about the underspend of \$700 000?

Mr D.J. KELLY: The \$700 000 difference between the estimated actual for 2015–16 and the budget amount, which was \$23 million. An amount of \$22 million is the estimated actual.

Ms E. White: I thank the member. Throughout any one year, as the member would imagine, different services come on line and there are delays in services; for example, if there is a vacancy and so on and so forth. We use a range of indicators to do the forward estimates and then we calibrate that at the end. A number of services have struggled to deliver the services in a couple of the locations. As a result, part of that period is unspent money. We have an ongoing and close, collaborative relationship with homelessness services in the sector. It is not unusual for us to transfer money from one agency to another at different parts of the year to ensure that we are delivering as many homelessness services as possible.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Which Western Australian homelessness services face cuts or reductions from July 2016 and what is the value of cuts for each service?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will ask the director general to answer that as she has that information.

Ms E. White: There is a reduction as a result of the national partnership agreement negotiations, as CPI and wage increases were not accommodated to the degree that Western Australia had requested. That has resulted in a reduction in some services and a cessation of others. I will list them, as the member has requested that information. We have had public tenancy support services by Anglicare WA and homelessness accommodation support service agencies in the south west reduced by \$72 000 and \$143 000 respectively. I should probably add that these adjustments were done in collaboration with the sector. We said that this was the shortfall and asked

how we could best make those adjustments to have the least impact, and this has been the collective recommendation. I will continue to list them. Homelessness accommodation support through Geraldton Resource Centre services was reduced by \$72 000. Housing support through Centacare in the west Kimberley district had a reduction of \$153 000. That service also received \$153 000 from another service in the region that was not able to deliver the service, so that money was reallocated at the same time. We had a reduction of \$50 000 to Bega Garribirringu Health Service in the goldfields district, based in Kalgoorlie. In the north west metropolitan area there was a reduction of \$75 000 to services delivered by Mission Australia. In the south west metropolitan corridor, funding to Mission Australia was again reduced by \$75 000. Funding to Swan Emergency Accommodation was also reduced by \$75 000, and the housing support service delivered by Anglicare in the south west metropolitan area was reduced by \$75 000. That will come into effect on 1 August.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I have one last question on homelessness. What is the estimated proportion of homelessness that is a result of domestic and family violence?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: We will get that information, but obviously it is a fluid number; it is not a set number.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the minister want to do that as a supplementary?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Yes, we will do it as a supplementary so that we can provide more accurate information.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the member happy with that?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I am, yes.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: We will provide the percentage of people who are homeless as a result of domestic violence.

[Supplementary Information No A72.]

Mr R.H. COOK: The member for Armadale thrust this in my hot little hand because he had to leave the chamber. I do not have a clue what it is about. I gather that it involves family support services on page 871. The member for Armadale is really interested to know, with regard to the Armadale Family Support Network: How many staff were attached to the program in 2015–16 and are expected in 2016–17? How many families were assisted in 2015–16 and are expected to be assisted in 2016–17? What was the total funding associated with 2015–16 and is expected to be provided in 2016–17? What has been achieved by the program to date? How about that? That was pretty articulate!

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: It was very good. I am sure the member will understand when I say that I need to take that as a supplementary. I will get that information for the member, which will make his job easier in telling the member for Armadale what has happened. I just ask the member to state the specifics again so that we get the exact information for the member for Armadale.

Mr R.H. COOK: It is with regard to family support services. In relation to the Armadale Family Support Network, how many staff were employed last year and will be employed in the coming year? How many families were assisted last year and will be assisted in the coming year? What was the total funding last year and for the coming year? The final line is: What has been achieved by the program to date? Specifically, has it resolved the Middle East crisis or irrigated vast areas of the Sahara Desert?

The CHAIRMAN: Are you happy with that, minister?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Subject to the last couple, absolutely; we will get that information for him.

Mr R.H. COOK: Evasive again!

[Supplementary Information No A73.]

The appropriation was recommended.

[12 noon]