

Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Frank Alban; Ms Janine Freeman; Chairman;
Mr John McGrath; Ms Simone McGurk

Division 68: Local Government and Communities (Except Service 5: Promotion and Support of Multiculturalism), \$100 954 000 —

Mr N.W. Morton, Chairman.

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

Ms J. Mathews, Director General.

Mr C. Johnson, Director, Financial and Business Services.

Ms E. Delany, Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Mr R. Peters, Director, Community Funding.

Mr B. Jolly, Executive Director, Sector Regulation and Support.

Mr S. Hollingworth, Executive Director, Community Building and Services.

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 both short and to the point. The estimates committee's considerations of the estimates will be restricted to the 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 division. It would greatly assist Hansard if members could 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 he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number to it. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation to ensure that it is delivered to the principal clerk by Friday, 3 June 2016. I also 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.

Minister, please introduce your advisers.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: I give the call to the member for Mandurah.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the first dot point on page 767 about the accountability and performance of local government. Has the Minister for Local Government met with or spoken at all to the Lord Mayor of the City of Perth about the ongoing investigation and subsequent State Administrative Tribunal investigation regarding the allegations against her; and, if so, when?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I have had no conversation with the Lord Mayor.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister has had none on this matter at all?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister has had no meetings with or calls from her? The Lord Mayor has not sought the minister's advice on the allegations that currently remain unresolved?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: When was the last time the minister spoke to the Lord Mayor of the City of Perth?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I think it was late last year, probably around November.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Does the minister not find it remarkable that this investigation is now more than six months after the original Corruption and Crime Commission report? Does he agree that the status of the City of Perth, and indeed the status of the role—not the person currently filling that role—of Lord Mayor of Perth has been damaged by the extensive time it has taken for the alleged breaches to be investigated?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I make the point that the Department of Local Government and Communities has done a very good job in this investigation. Quite a large body of work had to be undertaken. I think I have said in the house that the director general has now passed it on to the State Solicitor's Office to prosecute the case. With regard to the Lord Mayor, I very clearly make the point that the local government operates itself; this is an

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investigation into one individual. It is going through that process. It will play its way from there. I can only point out that this will be resolved as soon as it can be.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Given that the City of Perth Bill passed this Parliament earlier this year, and part of the act provides for the establishment of the Committee for Perth, when will the Committee for Perth meet? When it meets, will it be the first time that the minister will actually meet with the Lord Mayor since the last time he says he spoke to her late last year?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, it will be. We are now in that process. The act comes into effect on 1 July. The member would be very much aware that the legislation allows for a committee to be formed with the Lord Mayor, myself and the Premier. That will be kicked off in the second half of this year, or I imagine very shortly after 1 July. I think as we speak the wheels are in progress to put that together.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Has the minister or his department received or had concerns raised about the ongoing investigation and its impact on the status of the council and, indeed, the status of the Lord Mayor's position, given that the Deputy Lord Mayor recently expressed his view that the Lord Mayor should stand aside while these investigations continue? Has the minister and/or the department received any calls, formal letters or anything of that nature regarding the damage to the status of the City of Perth and/or the Lord Mayor's position?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No, I have not received anything. I point out, though —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Has the department received anything?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: With regard to the effect on the city, I will ask the director general to answer that question. In reality, I make one thing clear about the goings on at the City of Perth: it is an elected body. The Local Government Act clearly states that an elected body will govern the local government. Yes, the Lord Mayor and the Deputy Lord Mayor have had a bit of a discussion and moved a motion that resulted in a 5–4 vote. If I was to dismiss every council that moved a motion that resulted in a 5–4 vote, I would run out of commissioners! Let us be honest about this: the City of Perth has the highest status of our local governments. What is more important for me as the Minister for Local Government is to implement the Local Government Act, under which administrations provide services to ratepayers, such as picking up bins and sweeping roads. The operation of that is fine. Yes, there are some issues to do with the elected body, and the process is being worked through. It is more important for me as Minister for Local Government to implement the Local Government Act, and that is what I am doing.

[11.10 am]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have a further question about that answer. The minister has already made comment in recent media, using terms such as “disgraceful”, about the recent meeting when the council moved a motion of no confidence in the Deputy Lord Mayor, and the minister said that they were behaving like children in a playground —

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: They were.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: — and that it was disgraceful. Has the minister's communication with the City of Perth since late last year been mainly via the media?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That is correct.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister's comments have been to the media. I have a final question. The minister will probably need to provide this as supplementary information. Can the minister provide a list of all current investigations being carried out by the department into alleged breaches of the act, or concerns or complaints against councils, council staff and elected members?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will. Is that for every local government in Western Australia?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, for every local government in Western Australia.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: So the 138 local governments?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am happy to do that.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Included in this is the minister's so-called on-watch list.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Can the minister clarify that for *Hansard*?

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Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will provide to the member as supplementary information the ongoing investigations on all local governments in Western Australia in regard to any councillors and staff.

[Supplementary Information No B76.]

The CHAIRMAN: Was that the member's final further question on that topic?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes. But, lastly, the minister indicated that he has not spoken to the Lord Mayor since late last year. Does that include that he has not spoken to her at any function related to local government in that period?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Correct; I have not spoken to her since last year.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is there any reason for that?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Actually, she has just put in a request to meet with me, and I think that is going to happen in the next week or so. I think that has come through the channels. We will just have a chat about the City of Perth and the committee, and I think that is coming up in my diary. In the next couple of weeks I will be meeting with her.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Did the minister not think it was perhaps appropriate for the minister to have made contact with the Lord Mayor?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: As I said, I am following the Local Government Act quite closely to make sure that we keep this transparent. I am just concerned about making sure that I follow the Local Government Act. The Lord Mayor wrote to me seeking a meeting and we have followed that through and are about to have a meeting. It is the first time she has made contact to ask for a meeting, so we are happy to take that on board.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the third row in the second column of the table under "Relationship to Government Goals" on page 767 of the budget papers, which reads —

Seniors received concessions and rebates administered by the Department.

From time to time both the minister and Premier have said that we have the most generous concessions scheme of anywhere in Australia. I want to know the basis for that claim, how it has been calculated and whether it includes potential discounts available to seniors, or is it just solely on concessions?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We have compared concessions in Western Australia with those in the other states. The nearest state to us that offers the most concessions is, I think, Queensland. After that, the member will find that Victoria and New South Wales—the larger states—offer only around five or six concessions. We have compared the states on the amount of concessions and the dollar value of the concessions available with the WA Seniors Card. We have come up with the monetary value that people can obtain through their Seniors Card discounts and concessions and so forth. When we say that it is the most valuable seniors card in Australia, that is based on a number of issues, such as the amount of concessions received and the dollar value received when accessing concessions.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is the minister saying that that claim is based on the concessions and possible discounts, or is the claim based also on concessions that stand alone?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: To clarify, it is on concessions with the card, which is the amount of concessions received when people can get a discount. I have a list in front of me and there are about 15. I am happy to table this document that contains 15-odd concessions.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I thank the minister.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: As to the dollar value, Western Australia is the only state with a cost-of-living cash payment. Last year South Australia changed its council rebate; it took it away and gave it back as a cost-of-living rebate. South Australia has copied us. It took away rates concessions and then made a cash payment. South Australia is the second state to give a cash payment; prior to that we were the only state that did. Of course, the discounts go right through, with energy, water and shire rates still in play. I think the important part is to acknowledge the amount of work we do in this area to support seniors in our community.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the minister tabling that document?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, I will; it shows 14 concessions.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: In terms of monetary value, does the minister still contend that that is the case?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will just check with my director general, but I think the figure we came to is around \$1 500 a year with the WA Seniors Card. Can one of my advisers clarify that in the documents? They are savings people would get if they were to exercise the concessions.

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Ms M.M. QUIRK: No, I am talking about concessions alone.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I would have to go through and look at all the concessions, including water, power and shire rates concessions and the discount on drivers' licences, fishing licences and so forth. I do not have the individual figures.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: We might get that by way of supplementary.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am happy to provide supplementary information on the value of the concessions people receive with a WA Seniors Card.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: And interstate comparisons?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Does the member want interstate comparisons?

The CHAIRMAN: Is the minister comfortable with that?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am, as long as I can get the information from the eastern states. I think I should be able to.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister has already told us he has used it as a comparison.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I have, on the total value.

[*Supplementary Information No B77.*]

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I refer to the details of controlled grants and subsidies on page 774. The fifth line item refers to companion animal shelters. I recall that that funding initiative was for a limited time, and then a media release came out last year extending the funding for two more years. The 2016–17 budget has an allocation listed through the forward estimates. Can the minister update us on this funding and the shelters it is targeted at?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes; I thank the member for Swan Hills for his question. Yesterday I went out and did another media release to launch another \$800 000 over four years. That will bring the total money invested by this government to support companion animals to \$1.6 million. We originally started that support because we had made some huge changes. This government has been very committed to companion animals. We reviewed the Dog Act and brought in the cat legislation. We have done a huge amount of work to make sure companion animals are well protected and well resourced throughout the community. The facts are that to date the funding has assisted in more than 14 000 domestic pets being rescued, 11 000 domestic pets being rehomed, and 11 600 being sterilised, which is very important to reduce the number of unwanted pets. The Cat Haven in Shenton Park received an annual allocation of \$75 000, the Dogs' Refuge Home in Shenton Park, where I was yesterday, received \$75 000, the Animal Protection Society of WA in Southern River received \$12 500, the Swan Animal Haven in South Guildford received \$12 500, the K9 Rescue Group received \$12 500, and the Saving Animals From Euthanasia shelters statewide received another \$12 500, making a total of \$200 000. We have now allocated \$800 000 over the next four years to make sure that we can support companion animals in our community. More importantly, we will support those organisations that do fantastic work. The dog home I was at yesterday has more than 100 volunteers at one time or another to help out with looking after companion animals. It is a fantastic that we support companion animals in our community.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I refer to the youth grants under "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies" on page 774. Why has there been \$175 000 worth of cuts to the youth grants, considering that they are such minor amounts? Last year's forward estimates allocated \$1 149 000, but that has now been cut to \$974 000. What programs will be cut, and what is this government's commitment to youth, given this massive cut? Nothing on youth appears in the outcomes and key efficiency indicators.

[11.20 am]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The government is very supportive of youth. It has done a fair bit of work with youth. Since I have been the Minister for Youth, my department has done some great work with the Youth Affairs Council of WA. We moved the youth awards from April to November and have had an increase in the number of people applying for the awards. They had been dropping off. It has been very well done and we have worked closely with YACWA to do that. We have done a raft of work around Youth Week. We are also currently working with the Hong Kong government on an exchange program for later this year, which was part of the reason for my trip to the youth symposium in July last year. With regard to the figures in the realignment—I will pass over to the director general to give more details—the drop is more to do with the realigning of other grants and moving them around.

Ms J. Mathews: There has been a slight reduction but that is more due to a review of the various programs that are now available to youth and looking at new initiatives that are being developed for young people. There are

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some significant new initiatives, including funding by the country local government fund. An amount of \$1.4 million has been made available to support young people in local government. Although there has been a slight diminution —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: In the regions?

Ms J. Mathews: In the regions.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: By royalties for regions?

The CHAIRMAN: Member, we will have a question, we will have an answer, we will have a question and we will have an answer. Let the director general finish. You can ask as many further questions as you see fit.

Ms J. Mathews: If I may say, the member has referred to a particular line item. I am highlighting a reduction in a particular line item around youth grants. That has been supplemented by a range of different funding across the youth portfolio in other areas. It just does not show up in that particular line item.

Yes, the country local government fund, for example, has a major new initiative supporting young people to undertake traineeships and scholarships with local government, which was a really important strategic initiative. Although there might have been a reduction in a couple of the small grants-type programs, we are looking increasingly at strategic initiatives that support young people. For example, enhanced funding has gone into supporting some quite significant collective impact and collaborative activities for youth, such as the south east metro youth corridor partnership, which is a significant program. It is being carried out through a number of local governments in the south east metropolitan corridor to support young people across a range of areas. The overall effort in youth is significant. Approximately \$5.6 million per annum goes into supporting the youth portfolio.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I am looking at supplementary information A47 that was given to me in 2013: The minister gave me an outline of all the youth programs. If I add this up, about \$6.5 million was spent on youth in 2013–14. There was \$5 million from 2013–14 over a range of programs, and given that the government has cut \$175 000 out of the youth grants section, that would not indicate that there has been a significant movement. So that the minister can show me that, can he give me as supplementary information all of the Department of Local Government and Communities youth services expenditure? I would like it to follow the same format as the information he gave me on 22 August 2013. Can he give me the same information so that I can see how it matches up with what he gave me in that period?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am happy to provide as supplementary information the breakdown of the grants that are given out and the youth services that are provided through the Department of Local Government and Communities.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Can I clarify that it will take the same format as the previous supplementary information that was given to me in 2013, supplementary information A47, so that it can be compared?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No B78.*]

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I refer to the first dot point on page 767 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. Earlier this month the Minister for Local Government launched the MyCouncil website, where people can log on and find out how their council is performing. Does the minister have any figures that might indicate whether the community has embraced this initiative? What feedback has the minister had from the local government sector?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The MyCouncil webpage is a fantastic webpage to enable the community as a whole to understand where its local government is spending its money. When it was launched last month, it had just over 23 000 hits in the very first week. Even now it has 500 to 750 hits a day. It is a fantastic information tool to get access to what a local council is spending money on. One of the key issues for the department and me is that each year with rate notices—we are about to roll out another round of rate revenue—it is important for the ratepayers to be very much educated about where the council is spending their money. Ratepayers can see very clearly on that webpage how the rate revenue has risen in the past 12 months and they can go back over the previous four years to see the rate revenue. They can look at the council’s budget and how much is spent on wages and compare it with that spent by neighbouring councils. The important part is to educate the ratepayer. Most of the feedback I get is from councillors, who now have a better understanding of where their council is spending money. It has been one of those issues for councillors to try to understand. Prior to that, they had to work out ratios. Ratios came up on a screen and the average person, unless they were an accountant, would not understand what they meant. The easy-to-use format has been a useful tool for not only councillors and staff, but also ratepayers. We are trying to put downward pressure on rates. Now the ratepayers can be far more informed about the decision their council is making. When the council starts talking about this year’s rate increase, the

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ratepayers can see quite clearly how much the council has raised in rate revenue, how much has come in as grants and fees and how much has come in as fees and charges. People would be surprised at how many councils make a fair bit of money out of parking, especially those close to the city. The webpage is working very well. It is educating the ratepayer and, hopefully, that is the way we can get some transparency around local governments and how they spend ratepayers' money.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Is the minister able to give some indication of which communities are making the most hits on the site and which councils are attracting the most interest from their communities? Is there a premiership ladder for it?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I do not have a premiership ladder but I can point to the outer metropolitan growth councils where the pressure is strong to deliver services. They have the larger rate increases because the greenfield growth of a new council trying to deliver infrastructure puts a lot of pressure back onto the ratepayers. The greenfield growth areas, where the first homebuyers are, wear the brunt of larger rate increases because the councils are trying to build a lot more infrastructure very quickly. It is mainly around there more than anywhere else to have a look at and understand how the council is spending their money.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Would the minister be prepared to make that information public along the line so that we as members of the community get an idea about which councils are attracting more hits and whether people are happy or unhappy with them?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I encourage the member for South Perth as the local member to encourage his ratepayers to look at their council and, more importantly, to compare their local council with their neighbouring local council to get a comparison of how it is travelling in terms of rate increases, revenue, wages and staff, and to look at the population base. He should encourage his ratepayers to look at the website because they complain to their local member about rate increases: "My rates keep going up. What are you doing about it?" They should be directed to the webpage and they should be asking their councillors, not their local member, those questions. I encourage the member for South Perth to use that as a tool to help combat the issue of rate increases and to see what the council is doing and spending money on.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister did not answer the question about feedback from councils on the MyCouncil website. I understand that some councils, including mine, have raised concerns about it. Secondly, the minister mentioned growth councils. Is it the department's intention to introduce a rate cap on councils in Western Australia?

[11.30 am]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am on the record as saying that I do not support rate capping.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is not the question. Will the minister be introducing a capping system on councils?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I do not support rate capping, and I can clearly rule that out. We have no reason to bring in rate capping. The Local Government Act is written in such a way that it makes local councils independent bodies elected by ratepayers to make decisions on their behalf. What we need to do, and what we have done during my time as minister, is introduce more transparency with an integrated planning and reporting process, and community plans. Now the MyCouncil website introduces far more transparency, bringing the gift register online. Local governments will have to introduce more transparency. Every elected member of Parliament can see that. You can see that, Mr Chairman, when you travel and table the report in Parliament. Everything you do is available on the net, including your wages and the benefits you receive as a member of Parliament. This is what we have to do with local governments—put them in the same hemisphere of transparency and accountability.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Prior to last year's Western Australian Local Government Association Local Government Week, the minister, as well as the Premier, made comments about capping. Is the minister now saying that the Liberal Party, going to the election next March, will not be mooting a capping process for local government?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: In my speech for Local Government Week last year, which is available, I said that I am not in favour of rate capping. I do not believe that is the way in which local government should operate. Taking the New South Wales example, one of the key areas around rate capping is that it leads to efficiencies, but it will eventually affect infrastructure upgrades. That is one of the key issues around rate capping there. Victoria is going through it all now, and time will tell. From my perspective, local governments are autonomous bodies that can make their own decisions. They are responsible to their ratepayers. I do not support a rate capping system.

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Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Has the minister pursued that with the Premier? He has been overruled by the Premier on a number of occasions in the local government portfolio. Does the Premier agree with the minister's position?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I think the member should ask the Premier that question.

To finish up on the member's question about the City of Mandurah not being happy with the website, the City of Mandurah is a classic example of a fast-growing metropolitan council, and the member would know that. There has been greenfield growth in suburb after suburb in the 15 or 20 years that I have been associated with the area. Quite clearly, the city has to borrow to deliver some services—everything from tourist information through to roadworks. Its score was rather bad on only one indicator. The financial score was not as good as it could have been, and I take that on board, but it is only one of seven.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It was the sustainability indicator. It is a pretty significant indicator.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, but there are seven parameters that need to be applied to a local government to work out whether it is working. The most important thing about borrowings is that they must be able to be maintained on the rate base, and that is one of the key issues. Also, is the council able to replace its assets? The borrowing is one area that brings Mandurah down, but it is more important to acknowledge that Mandurah is both an outer metropolitan growth council and a regional centre. For example, it provides a performing arts centre that is used by everyone in the Peel region, including me, but they do not pay a cent to the City of Mandurah to maintain or run it. It is one of the key regional centres. Bunbury is similar in a lot of ways; it is a regional centre, and everyone from surrounding areas will come in and use its facilities. When we dig a bit deeper, we find that the City of Mandurah is travelling reasonably well. Its financial score was not quite as good, and it has a bit of work to do, but it is operationally good and it is ticking the boxes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the first dot point on page 767 of the *Budget Statements*, which is about transparency. This relates to the transparency measures that were part of the City of Perth Bill, which amended the Local Government Act. As the minister is aware, his department sent out a memo or a bulletin, not long after that bill passed through Parliament, with about eight or so examples of when gifts should be declared et cetera. This has caused some consternation amongst councils. How many councils have informed the minister that they are suspending activities that may be construed as relating to receiving gifts? How many such notices has the minister and/or the department received? What communication has the minister sent to local governments about the implications of the new transparency measures?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I have received no more than four or five letters from local councils about the gift register. The gift register has been there since 1995, and, as the member is aware, I did not change that legislation; we just replaced the annual return with an online system to get some transparency. We added some conditions that gifts must be declared within 10 days of being received. We have obtained some legal advice through the department on what constitutes a gift. As to the eight scenarios that were sent out, to a lawyer the question of what constitutes a gift would be black and white. I understand that it has caused a bit of angst in the wider community and I have seen a lot of stuff going back and forth internally and in local papers. We have worked with the department, the Local Government Managers Association and the Western Australian Local Government Association to form a committee to look at and review the issue of gifts. We started this three or four years ago, but it did not actually go anywhere. It was raised pretty much as soon as I first became minister in 2013. The president said at the time that the \$300 limit had moved on a bit, and now the return showed \$500, and it did not make sense why it was one and not the other. We agreed then to do some work, but that work did not progress far enough to produce any recommendations for changes.

We need to determine what a gift is, and that is one of the key issues that comes unstuck. If a councillor is receiving a gift for something in return, it will need to be declared. If a councillor mows his neighbour's lawn and then receives a cup of tea and a piece of cake afterwards, is that a gift? Not really, but if a developer who will be doing some work for the council takes a councillor to the football, that has to be declared because there is a conflict of interest, and there could be some sort of financial gain for the developer. We start pulling it apart and try to work out whether a Mandurah councillor has to declare that his cousin gave him a Blu-ray player for his birthday. The act is quite clear; it is black and white, and it states that, and that is the interesting part about it. We need to work together to review the gift provisions in the act, to clearly define whether the person we are dealing with has any involvement with the council. That is probably what the determination has to be. In that case, we can make sure we are being transparent.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Part of this whole issue is communication. What communication is the minister currently sending, or has the minister sent, to 140 councils about this matter, not necessarily from the department but from the minister? I will give the minister a very quick example. Last night there was a dinner in Mandurah for a movie that is to be filmed and funded in the Peel region, with Ben Elton. The organiser of the dinner

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informed me last night that the Mayor and the CEO of the City of Mandurah declined to go, citing the issue of the gift. It is still causing concern, and, it seems, is preventing —

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will clarify that issue for the member, and I will pass the question to my director general to give him a clarification —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This shows that councils out there are now saying that they will not be involved in this or that, citing these transparency measures. What is the minister doing to clarify and make this crystal clear, and to communicate with the councils, because it seems to be causing confusion?

The CHAIRMAN: Members, we will hear a question and then get an answer.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will pass this question to the director general to clarify, but it is very clear that local governments should get their own advice. They are quite entitled to do that; it is not up to me or the department to write to them with advice, but we can provide some guidelines. I am pretty sure that if the local government declares attending a dinner to promote the Peel region with a film project as a gift, that is a way around the issue. That is the interesting part about it; the gift can be received, but it must be declared. The director general will provide a bit more information about how that can be done, what work we are doing in this area to make sure we can do it, and the information that has gone out.

[11.40 am]

Ms J. Mathews: The purpose of the amendments to the Local Government Act about gifts was to alter the timing and the method of declaration, but not the circumstances in which declarations are to be made. That was not changed. Prior to the act being amended and coming into force, the department sent out a number of circulars to local governments informing them, advising them, giving a heads-up and clarifying the point of those amendments. It subsequently sent out an information bulletin, because it was starting to get a few inquiries, and over the years has had a few inquiries, about the circumstances in which to declare gifts. In the past we have issued some guidelines around that and, more recently, we had the information bulletin setting out a range of scenarios in which to provide guidance to the sector around that. At the end of the day, it is up to each elected member to seek their own advice on what to declare. It is up to them to do that. Our role is to educate, and to provide advice and guidance around that. The response has indicated what is probably a gap in understanding the existing requirements. Those requirements have been in place since 1995, essentially since the Local Government Act was introduced. As I said, the circumstances have not changed for when a gift needs to be declared; it is the method and timing of the disclosure which, of course, now needs to happen as part of a gift register.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I do not dispute that. Essentially, the amendments to the City of Perth Act and, ultimately, to the Local Government Act simply require councils to publicly publish on a website a gift register. I cited one example last night, but there are many others. The Western Australian Local Government Association has written about this in its publication, including the most recent “Western Councillor”. There is confusion and concern. What is the minister doing to allay that confusion and concern? If this is still continuing, as late as the example that I gave last night, the message is not getting through. What is the minister going to do? Is he going to issue a ministerial statement or write to all the councils as minister—not as the department—clarifying the situation, because that would help clarify this confusion?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The important part here is that each local government is entitled to obtain its own advice on what a gift is. It is clear from what the member said that when someone receives a gift valued at over \$200 that they declare it. All they have to do is declare it, and they can take the gift, go to the dinner and do what they want. That rule has not changed; it has always been there. The interesting part that I take on board is that there is a little bit of confusion. In fact, it worries me that local government councillors have all of a sudden woken up to the fact that the 1995 act outlines what a gift is, but they are saying that they did not understand what a gift was. That is concerning and hence why I have been pushing very hard for councillor training.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Minister, the quotation marks will not come up in *Hansard*.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The interesting part is that we are working with WALGA to try to resolve this. It concerns me that the City of Mandurah cannot work out whether it should accept this gift. It means that it does not understand the Local Government Act, which is something that needs to be raised with them. I am sure that councillors can avail themselves of advice to find out what they have to do so that they can go to the dinner. In no way would I like to think that the mayor could not go along and represent her city at such a big event, such as screening of a film by Ben Elton on the Peel region, which is fantastic. It is right that the mayor of Mandurah attends, and possibly all the mayors from the surrounding regions should attend too. We are getting to the bottom of it. I am waiting for WALGA to come back to me. I have asked WALGA to put together a working group that

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will come back to the department. We need to define what a gift is. When that comes through, we can communicate that back to them. But advice is always available to local governments.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I refer to page 774 “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”, the line item “Community Gardens”. Minister, community gardens is a popular initiative from the Liberal–National government and a group in my electorate received funding when it was first announced. From memory, funding was for a four-year period and continued into the out years. Can the minister update me on the rollout of the community gardens initiative?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for Dawesville. This initiative came from the last election in which we supported community gardens as a whole. It is a fantastic use, normally of a vacant block down the road, so that a community can come together. The initiative goes a long way to supporting the community network and the fabric around a community to come together. I have found the opportunity as minister to visit quite a few community gardens and it is amazing to see the wide spectrum of people—young and old—who get involved with their community garden. These gardens work really well. Another point is that community gardens help communities come together to build community spirit and understanding of their neighbours and also to combat problems in the community on a wider level. Community gardens are fantastic. Since its introduction, the program has provided grants worth \$350 000 to 27 community gardens throughout Western Australia. For the record, that is 11 in the metropolitan area and 16 in the regions, with \$20 000 available to create new gardens and \$10 000 for existing gardens. We will maintain those levels into the future and will continue to fund community gardens. They have been doing fantastic work. The member for Mandurah will be interested to know that the community garden in his electorate received \$9 900 back in 2014 to host an open day and to fund a guest speaker to deliver a smarter education session in the community. Community gardens are fantastic little organisations that operate throughout the state for communities. It is great that this government has recognised community gardens and has continued that funding for the next four years.

Dr K.D. HAMES: While we are talking about local government grants, I was recently in Kununurra and I spoke to the mayor of the Shire of Wyndham–East Kimberley who talked about the 130th anniversary of Wyndham. Are there any local government grants that would assist in such a celebration?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am looking forward to that celebration in August. As an ex-Wyndham kid, I spent seven years of my life there. As Minister for Local Government I funded one of the organisations for that 130th anniversary celebration. I am happy to have a chat with the council about other grants that may be available. It is a very auspicious occasion. The port of Wyndham was a big part of the state’s infrastructure, and also with the live export trade in recent years. In my day, the meat works employed over 500 people in its heydays of the 1970s. The Kimberley has changed and fortunately Wyndham will survive because of the port, but Kununurra has taken over from Wyndham. It is called the Shire of Wyndham–East Kimberley because Wyndham was the larger of the two towns in my day, but things have moved on a lot and it is now struggling. It will have a great celebration in August and I will have a chat with the member and make sure that we can find some grants to help out celebrations. I know that I have already helped one community organisation that had written to me, and I hope that we can find some more.

The CHAIRMAN: That was a long bow for a further question on community gardens, but I will let the member off because he was silent on the previous division.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the table on page 767 and the reference to desired outcomes for concessions. Where is the plan to have a private company manage the Seniors Card that was supposed to be announced on 13 May? Where that is at and what is the rationale for doing it, and how much money does the government think it will save?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The government is trying to broaden the WA Seniors Card. Currently WA has over 300 000 Seniors Card holders. Every two years I print a booklet that tells people where they can get a discount with their Seniors Card, but unfortunately from the day it is printed it is almost obsolete; and if someone drops out or someone wants to come in, they have to wait two years. We are trying to partner with someone who can deliver more of an online service to seniors. The first stage has been to set up a WA Seniors Card portal. Recently we had 20 000 hits on that web page. This portal allows people to see what they can get with their WA Seniors Card. When people log in they will know when to apply for their cost of living rebate and what other milestones are coming up. We want to take that one step further. For instance, if I wanted to spend the day in Mandurah, I could hop onto this web page and find that I could travel on the train after nine o’clock for free. I would know when I got into Mandurah where I could get a cup of coffee, and that I could get a discount at Peel Zoo and where I can use my card to get a discount for lunch at a restaurant, and then I could make my way back to Perth. We are trying to make it easier for seniors to explore the metropolitan area, and if they are travelling interstate or in a regional area, so they know at which motels or other businesses that they can get a discount. We are trying to add value to the Seniors Card. It is little confusing when people have to walk into

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a shop and ask whether they can get a discount, so we are working with a company to see if we can make this information available online. The member is right. We went out for expressions of interest to see whether we could find a way to work with a company to set up the webpage with an available portal through which seniors could find out about available discounts. Consequently, it is separate from the WA Seniors portal; no information or data from the website will be transferred. It will be up to seniors to login to the webpage to see what concessions or trips are available. Obviously the company that owns it will sell advertising on the website, and I am guessing that such advertising will target seniors and advertise glasses and so forth or whatever the company wants to advertise. It has been a really good way of adding more value to the Seniors Card so that seniors can work out where to get discounts. We have also tried to make the user-friendly process a lot better. I understand that not all seniors have access to the internet, so what is currently in play for seniors will continue. Seniors can still phone the Seniors Card Hotline to find out where to get discounts. I advise local members of Parliament that the hotline is available if they want to help their seniors find information. The hotline will keep running. This will not change the paper system or the phone system. We are trying to add more value to the Seniors Card and we are trying to be more smart and savvy about how seniors can access that information.

[11.50 am]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: A booklet is published from time to time but it is no longer posted. Does the minister intend to publish the booklet under this system?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No, we will not publish the booklet, but it is now available online. If people want to print the booklet, they can do so, but it contains quite a few pages; or they can print the page that shows the restaurant or coffee shop that they want to go to. Seniors can look up the booklet online to get an address. They do not have to do much at all. It is available through the WA Seniors Card Hotline. Seniors can ring up and ask where they can do this or that. The problem with the booklet was that the minute it was printed, it was pretty much obsolete. Further, if businesses wanted to advertise in the booklet that their business offers a discount with the WA Seniors Card, they had to wait another two years to do so. The booklet will remain available online. Basically, since November 2015, 3 000 online account services have been registered. The booklet is still there, but in an online version. The cost of printing it and putting it together will be transferred to finding a better way to support seniors.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Can the minister supply information about how much money will be saved by no longer publishing the booklet?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am happy to provide as supplementary information the cost involved in putting together the biannual “WA Seniors Card Discount Directory”.

[Supplementary Information No B79.]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: One of the extended concessions that came in last year was free after-hours public transport for seniors. How many seniors are now travelling after hours?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I worked out that figure just the other month with the Premier. There have been quite a few.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: By way of clarification, minister, I have asked this question on notice several times and all I get is the total number for the period since it was expanded. I want to know who travels between 6 pm and 6 am.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I am happy to provide by way of supplementary information the number of seniors who travel between the hours of 7.00 pm and 6.00 am

[Supplementary Information No B80.]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Mr Chairman, I have a procedural issue. On the program half an hour has been allocated to the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board. I understand that I indicated that we would need some time, but it is actually a part of this division. We will need only 15 minutes, so I request that the committee resolve —

The CHAIRMAN: It is set in stone.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Can the committee resolve to change it?

The CHAIRMAN: The committee can resolve only to change the order of proceedings, but once the divisions within that time frame are set, they are set.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: But this is part of the division.

The CHAIRMAN: It is listed separately. Sorry, member. I understand the intent of what you are trying to do, but unfortunately I cannot accommodate your request.

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MS S.F. MCGURK: I refer to the spending changes on page 765 and the line item “Cessation of Beyond Gambling Grants”. Half a million dollars will be removed each year in the forward estimates. Was this money given to a not-for-profit to give that advice; and, if so, which not-for-profit? How many people accessed the service over the last three financial years?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I may have to take the question on notice about who received the grants. As the member noted, the gambling grant stopped and has been rolled into financial counsellors. As the member may remember, last year my department —

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Money that you halved.

The CHAIRMAN: Hang on. I have been consistent about this the whole time. We will hear an answer and then members can ask a question.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: As the member would be aware, the responsibility for financial counsellors was transferred from the Department for Child Protection to the Department of Local Government and Communities. To fund that, we have rolled the Beyond Gambling grants into that to fund financial counsellors in the metropolitan area. That is where that money has gone. Beyond Gambling grants were established in 2011 in partnership with the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor to build a social partnership to provide alternative engagement to social gambling. Since the program inception, \$1.3 million has been provided for 20 projects that were undertaken by a number of community organisations to facilitate Beyond Gambling projects throughout Western Australia. The program has provided grants of up to \$200 000 for mainly non-profit community organisations and local government to deliver local solutions to address social gambling issues. Problem gambling can cause severe financial stress. The annual funding of \$500 000 Beyond Gambling grants has been redirected to the new financial counselling model in the metropolitan area.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Just to clarify, did the minister say 1.3 million visits?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Since the program’s inception in 2011, \$1.3 million has been provided.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Has the state government done an assessment of problem gamblers and what is happening to people in the community who have issues with problem gambling?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The Minister for Racing and Gaming might have the statistics on how many people are affected by gambling. As the Minister for Community Services, I do not have any data about how many people have been contacted about gambling problems.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I am interested in this. Is the minister saying that a lot of seniors have gambling problems?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No, not seniors—the general, wider community. Just to clarify, in 2011 Beyond Gambling grants for community organisation throughout Western Australia were established in partnership with the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor. An account was put aside from which the organisation could apply for funds as long as the organisation helped people with gambling problems address their concerns. Last year—and this year—\$500 000 was taken from those grants and rolled into financial counselling. It is not just seniors, member for South Perth, but the wider community in general.

[12 noon]

Ms S.F. MCGURK: So that we are clear, was the money allocated for financial counselling halved? When the minister said that he had rolled half a million dollars into the new financial counselling arrangements, is that amount the same as the amount that has already been cut? Is the state government collecting any information about problem gambling in the community?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We collect data through the financial counselling services, and we could possibly get some data from those services about problem gambling.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: I would be interested to receive that information.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will look into the evaluation of problem gambling by financial counselling associations and provide supplementary information.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: To clarify, I did not necessarily ask about the evaluation of problem gamblers. I would like to know whether there is any tracking of problem gamblers in the community and the number of cases that the association has seen. Also, while we are on this issue, can I have a list of the previous service providers of that advice?

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Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will provide a list of the service providers and an analysis of the number of people seeking financial counselling to do with gambling problems.

[*Supplementary Information No B81.*]

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I refer to the details of controlled grants and subsidies at page 774. I have six cadet programs and over 260 cadets in my electorate; the program is really popular. I know the minister is a big supporter of this program. Why can I not see funding for cadets in this budget?

[Mr I.C. Blayney took the chair.]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member for Swan Hills is right; the cadet program has been rolled into the overall budget. The line item allocation of \$3.5 million comprises \$2.7 million for cadet programs, \$750 000 for instructor recognition award payments and \$50 000 for administration expenses to promote and coordinate grants. It is a whole-of-government community service partnership involving the state government, the Department of Education, the Department of Parks and Wildlife, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, WA Police, the Australian Defence Force and the community sector. It is part of this government's commitment to develop youth leadership in Western Australia. Nearly 8 500 students participate in 200 cadet units, which are supported by 600 volunteers.

The member rightly should be very proud of the cadet units in his electorate. There are 26 police rangers at Swan Valley Anglican Community College, 30 Australian Air Force cadets at RAAF Base Pearce, 57 emergency services cadets at Swan Christian College, 30 Army Corps cadets at Eastern Hills Senior High School and 72 bush rangers and 60 river rangers at Mundaring Christian College. The cadet program is fantastic. This year the program celebrates its twentieth year. I went to John Septimus Roe Anglican Community School where the program was launched 20 years ago. It was a great morning to celebrate the occasion with the then Premier, Richard Court, and a number of people from the department who were involved with the cadet program when it started. This is a fantastic program that encourages young people to get involved in leadership roles, team building and so forth. Participation in cadets can lead to roles such as volunteer firemen with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and also roles with the State Emergency Service, which is also very good. It is a great program. The member is right that the cadet program does not show up as a line item but it is in the line item with the allocation of over \$3.5 million.

Ms S.F. McGURK: My question relates to page 766 and the Centre for Parenting Excellence. There is an allocation of \$200 000 per annum to be used to establish a cross-sector parenting centre. Where will the centre be based? Will a not-for-profit agency run the centre; and, if so, which agency? What will be the staffing profile and what services will be provided? How many parents does the minister expect the centre to see?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The current Parenting WA centre in Mt Lawley will be used for the new Centre for Parenting Excellence. The centre comes from a recommendation from the Commissioner for Children and Young People, which identified that we should have a centre where we can start these programs. The budget states quite clearly that the government is currently competing with the not-for-profit sector in providing parenting services, which is not a position the government should be in. The old-fashioned parenting workers are not going to the Parenting WA centre in Mt Lawley anymore; they are engaging in their communities at the community level, and that is where we need to have people working. The best thing for me to do as the Minister for Community Services is to work with the not-for-profit sector to deliver those services. We are kicking off the Centre for Parenting Excellence to look at how we can engage with best practice in parenting, to undertake monitoring and to provide a base for people involved in parenting programs to help them gain more skills. There is \$200 000 to kick off the program and it will be run by the department to start with. We will then work through how we will run the centre in the future. I am sure the director general can add more to that.

Ms J. Mathews: I will supplement what the minister has talked about. For us, this is a very exciting initiative and it has been very well received by the parenting sector, particularly the providers of parenting services we have spoken to. The idea is that the Centre for Parenting Excellence will be a focal point and a hub for parenting in this state. It will be responsible for best practice in the parenting sector and it will play a key role coordinating and integrating parenting services. That appears to be the real gap in the sector in terms of what is available at the moment. There are many parenting centres in the community, but there appears to be a lack of oversight and coordination. The department proposes that the Centre for Parenting Excellence will play that key role. The centre will be staffed by departmental officers, but the idea is that it will be oversighted and steered by a steering committee. The steering committee will be co-chaired by me, as director general, and an eminent expert and practitioner in the field—we are in the process of approaching key people for that role at the moment—and will comprise representatives from the commonwealth; representatives from key state government agencies involved in the parenting space including the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, the Department of

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Health and the Department of Education; and a number of key not-for-profit agencies in this area, such as Ngala and Centrecare. We are really trying to bring together a number of key stakeholders to align what we can achieve in the parenting sector to ensure that over time parents are getting the support they need.

One of the first tasks of the new parenting centre will be to do a stocktake of and map the sector. We propose that that will be one of the first initiatives of the Centre for Parenting Excellence. As the minister mentioned, it is proposed that the centre will be located at Mt Lawley.

Ms S.F. McGURK: One of the specific questions I asked was: what staffing profile can the department provide with \$200 000 per annum? The second question is: how does that compare with the savings from abolishing the Parenting WA courses and the Best Start program?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will let the director general answer the question about staffing levels. But, importantly, we are putting money into parenting programs. Ceasing the operation of Parenting WA in Mt Lawley will allow support of over \$1 million to be put in the not-for-profit sector to make sure that we can support parents in the community. That funding has been accepted by the Western Australian Council of Social Service and the not-for-profit sector because they have identified that that is where the funding needs to be. We are happy to work with them.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Excuse me, minister. It was a bit hard to hear how much funding the minister said he is cutting and how much funding he is putting into the not-for-profit sector.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will let the director general answer the question about the staffing levels. The line item in the budget is for funding for the parenting centre.

[12.10 pm]

Ms J. Mathews: Savings will be achieved through the cessation of Parenting WA. In the first half of that year, that will amount to around \$1.3 million and going forward, that will be up to \$2.5 million per annum. That is reflected in the savings measures as part of the agency expenditure review. An extra \$1 million will support the not-for-profit sector in the delivery of parenting services. That will bring the total contribution from the department to the not-for-profit sector up to just under \$6 million per annum. That will be put out to the not-for-profit sector to support parenting services. That is certainly a considerable increase from the current funding that goes out to support the not-for-profit sector in the parenting space.

In addition, an initial amount of \$200 000 has been put aside for staffing. We are looking at having one of our existing senior staff members commence as an inaugural director of the centre. She is already a staff member within the department. That will be supplemented by two other positions that will be advertised. That is what the staffing will look like and that is what the bulk of that \$200 000 will go to. In addition, we will be looking at an operational budget for the centre. This has been evolving for a little while. Obviously, one of the key things is to get the steering committee to come together and meet. We are really aiming and hoping that the steering committee will help to provide input and support the co-design of the centre in its key tasks and its terms of reference. We want to do this very much as a partnership and collaborative effort with other state government agencies and the not-for-profit sector.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am pleased to hear the adviser's enthusiasm about these initiatives but the reality is that from the figures that were just given, over \$1 million has been cut from parenting programs and advice on parenting to families under this budget. Over \$1 million has been cut per annum. Is that correct?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: More importantly, we are delivering these services through the community sector, which will give us better value for money. I am confident that the service delivery will be the same if not better.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Because they pay cheaper wages.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Not at all. As the Minister for Community Services, I know that my not-for-profit sector can deliver these services a lot better than a government agency can ever do. People in the sector are far more in tune with their community; they know their community a lot better. Some fantastic community organisations are delivering their services right through the south east corridor that I represent as a local member.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The minister said before that he was confident that the not-for-profit sector can provide this sort of advice and deliver these sorts of services a lot better than government employees. On what basis does he make that claim? What assessments have been made that compare the government provision of those services with the not-for-profits or is it just a hunch that the minister has?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: At the Western Australian Council of Social Service awards I clearly saw outstanding individuals and organisations receiving awards for the amount of work they are doing in our sector. I am very much in tune and out quite regularly with the 350-odd non-profit organisations in Western Australia. I am

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constantly meeting and talking with the 150 non-profit organisations that I fund through the Department of Local Government and Communities to the tune of \$25 million a year. They have accepted this parenting service as a really good thing. They reckon that that is where we need to be as a government. It is a really good outcome for the sector as a whole. It is about delivering services to the community; it is not about basing people in a house in Mt Lawley, which is unacceptable for public transport reasons. They are not going to go there. The services have to go to the communities. That is where we put the services. In addition, we have a call centre and a few other things that are happening but the face-to-face contact dropped from nearly 1 200 in the first quarter of 2011–12 down to 596 in 2014–15, so half the number of calls are coming in. The reason for that is that far more non-profit organisations in this hemisphere are taking the calls directly out in the community. We as a government have reacted to the downturn in the number of people coming in by looking at our model of providing parenting services. It is not about basing them in a house in Mt Lawley; it is about having them out in the community where the parents are supporting the non-profit organisations to deliver services to their communities.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I reiterate my question about whether there has been any formal evaluation of the government assessment of delivery of those services in regard to the decision to hand over some of those funds—not all the funds that the government is cutting from the services—to the not-for-profit sector. I agree that the not-for-profit sector does a good job but, in my experience, so do state government employees who are doing this. I think they would be very concerned to hear their minister speaking about their work in the way that he has in answering these questions both today and in the Legislative Assembly during questions without notice. I repeat: has there been any formal assessment of the delivery of those services?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Just to clarify the staffing level, we have already started off with the department and the non-profit sector through WACOSS looking at those key staff who are working for the government already, delivering those services out in some of the suburban areas to make sure that we can work with them and ensure that they have the knowledge and the background so we can hook them up with the non-profit sector to make sure there is some transition and continuity of the services they are delivering. We are working on that as we speak. We still have until 31 December this year, so another seven months to go, but we have a lot of work to do before the evaluation process. All my tender contracts go out for three and five years. An evaluation is taken at the end of that contract to ensure that the agency is delivering those services and that the department is happy with them. They all get evaluated on renewing their contracts to make sure that they are delivering the services. We constantly monitor where their money is being spent and, more importantly, the amount of contact they have with the sector as a whole to make sure that the taxpayers of Western Australia are getting value for money from the services being provided to their communities.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: In light of the time, I will try to merge two questions into one. I refer to the third dot point on page 766, which relates to the demographic information of our ageing community. I want to ask two questions. The first relates to the prevalence of elder abuse, particularly financial elder abuse, and the fact that we have the highest number of people who have been a victim of scams in Australia. I think seniors are overrepresented in that regard. I want to talk about that. Yes, there is the elder abuse hotline but other measures such as amending legislation and so on have not been progressed. I just want the minister's response on how we will progress these issues.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The elder abuse hotline is funded through my department. It has been fantastic. Advocare provides services to seniors. It is a very good one-stop shop for handling any type of abuse. Obviously, if there are any medical issues or issues that need to be dealt with by the police, they are redirected. The member is right; the scams that have occurred in the last number of months have impacted on seniors. I have raised those concerns with the Minister for Commerce to make sure that we are putting some programs in place. I spoke to him about cards that we put in doctors' surgeries and common places where senior citizens meet to make them aware of these scams. That is similar to the program we put in place with the elder abuse hotline. The most important thing we can do is make sure that we talk about elder abuse in general, whether or not that relates to scams. More often than not, the abuse comes from inside the family, perhaps from people's siblings and also extended families. As the world has moved on, we now have a lot of extended families. We find that most of the abuse occurs very close to home.

I take the member's concerns on board. We have set up the elder abuse hotline. More importantly, I am working with the Minister for Commerce to make sure that we can get some information out to make seniors aware of it. A number of organisations, including the Council on the Ageing, National Seniors Australia and the Association of Independent Retirees, send out a fair bit of information to their membership to make them aware of the scams that are occurring. It is important that we are always very vigilant about what is happening in our community. These scammers can hide behind computer screens and get access to seniors.

The government has a continuous commitment to supporting seniors. It has invested more than \$570 000 to the community service sector, promoting social, emotional and physical wellbeing for seniors. This is funded through the Department of Local Government and Communities in partnership with organisations such as the

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Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre, which provides for seniors experiencing or at risk of experiencing elder abuse, and Playgroup WA for facilitating intergenerational activities between seniors and families and young people through the Learning Together course. The City of Greater Geraldton and the Seniors Recreation Council have facilitated a range of activities and programs that support seniors to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle.

[12.20 pm]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: One of the issues, as the minister said, is that a lot of financial elder abuse is instituted within a family situation. One of the problems identified is the misuse of enduring powers of attorney. The minister said that he has had discussions with the Minister for Commerce. How have the discussions with the Attorney General been going to close some of the loopholes?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Enduring powers of attorney are interesting. I am going through that right now with my mother-in-law, my father-in-law and my wife, who is their only child, and fair bit of work needs to be done. I have seen firsthand what my father-in-law has to do in terms of recording every time he fills the car with petrol, goes shopping or pays a power bill, and it then goes off to get credited. Every year we reapply for the EPA. My mother-in-law cannot walk or talk and is basically in the late stages of Alzheimer's disease. I see that very clearly. My wife is quick to raise the issue that her dad should not have to do all this recording and reporting and then get it checked, but the system is set up in a way to protect the wellbeing of Val, more importantly. We can look at it with clear eyes and see that my father-in-law has a heart of gold and does this fantastic work of being a full-time carer, but if the tables were turned and he was not doing that, one would have to wonder who would look after the welfare of the person affected. The classic example is if something were to happen and my wife's dad did not do what she would like him to do, she would be on the doorstep of her local member complaining that her father is not spending the money how it should be spent. Enduring powers of attorney work well, but it is a legal document and quite cumbersome. I know firsthand how well an enduring power of attorney works. The Public Trustee is the next level up and more information has to be provided, which is quite a lot of work for an individual. I have seen what my father-in-law has gone through and I wonder how seniors go through it because it is a lot of work. Jennifer Mathews can add a little more to that.

Ms J. Mathews: The Department of Local Government and Communities has been in discussion with the Department of the Attorney General and we have held workshops and sessions with the Office of the Public Advocate to ensure that some of the services and tools and the helpline are properly promoted through correct channels. Clearly, it has a key role in supporting seniors around drawing up, for example, an enduring power of attorney, and it can highlight the risks of going down that path.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister mentioned that he has a family member with Alzheimer's. Obviously, with an ageing population, the number of people with dementia is increasing. In the last few days, the media has reported a number of cases in which people have gone wandering and are missing. I wonder whether there is any role for the Minister for Seniors and Volunteering to raise community awareness about the issues with people with early stage dementia if a person sees someone wandering the streets.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It has been an interesting experience. I met with Rhonda Parker from Alzheimer's Australia. She has done a fair bit of work on a social innovation method. We are re-funding her so that she can continue to do that great work. When we launched that report last year in Joondalup, she told an interesting story about a couple of people from a small country town. The father would walk into the supermarket and grab something from the shelf and then walk out without paying. Initially, this caused a lot of conflict, but the daughter created an account at the supermarket and now they know to put things on the account and she will come in and fix it up. Her dad knows where to go to get the paper and the milk and how to get home, but society is not designed for that situation. The problem was identified and the solution was simple, but we have to be conscious of keeping an eye on it. Over 12 years ago, when my mother-in-law came to visit me, she knocked on the door of John's house next door. He had to tell her that I lived next door and send her across, and that was when she was very much capable of walking around. The condition slowly creeps up on a person and one can see very clearly when they are confused. Foremost in our minds should be how we deal with this debilitating disease. In the early days of onset, it is very hard on the person especially and it can be very frustrating. I can tell the member that it is not much better at the other end either. However, we are funding Alzheimer's Australia, and in trying to build the capacity of local government, we have established the Age Friendly Communities Local Government Grants program, which very much looks at how we will design our communities in the future to ensure that they are age friendly and take into consideration what dementia and Alzheimer's does to our wider community, and how we integrate and support those people more than anything else.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the table headed "Western Australian Family Foundation Special Purpose Account" on page 778. I asked some questions about this last year and it seems that the only people who are aware of it or how one goes about applying for it are members of National Party. I thought that they already had

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a trough of their own. I still cannot get information on this account. I had a couple of cases that I thought would fall under this kind of funding, but I have not been able to find how we go about accessing this fund.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member could have written to the minister.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I did and I did not get a reply.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Seriously?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: My apologies. I will have to chase that up for the member for Girrawheen.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: It was about a year ago.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I apologise. I will go through a couple of the areas that have been given money under the Western Australian family foundation special purpose account. This year we have given \$20 000 to the Waroona Community Resource Centre in response to the Waroona bushfire. We have also given funds to the Pilbara Childrens' Education Trust and the Boonderu Music Academy. That is a fantastic music academy run for Aboriginal children at the school, which I visited in July last year—it was fantastic to see. We have also helped out Carnamah Historical Society and Museum, which is not based in Carnamah. It involves virtual volunteers over the internet and it has been an outstanding project. We also helped out Waroona with its oval reconstruction. During the fires, the oval was used as an emergency base and was quite badly damaged. So the Minister for Sport and Recreation, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Local Government and Communities got together to put in some money and help out. We are also running another trial called SilverSport, which is very similar to KidSport.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Does the minister know something about that?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, I do. I put money into SilverSport —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Just on that, how were the four areas that run the pilot program identified? The metropolitan area is substantially under-represented.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We did a review and based the pilot program in the areas with the highest number of seniors with pension cards. A person must have a pension card to access the money. We wanted to try it out in some rural and metropolitan areas. The pilot program is basically run through the Department of Sport and Recreation, but as the Minister for Seniors and Volunteering, I thought that I should be part of that process. We have allocated \$60 000 to help support the trial program for SilverSport to see whether it can work. It is very similar to the KidSport program. SilverSport will be a program for seniors. It is a way to help sponsor those seniors in the community who do dancing, yoga and those types of activities if they cannot afford to do them.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I am familiar with the program. I just cannot work out why 40 per cent of the program is based in the electorate of the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The member will have to ask the Minister for Sport and Recreation about that. We have also funded the Carnarvon Police and Community Youth Centre's Drop-in Girls Space, which is really good. Carnarvon has a huge problem with kids on the street late at night, so we have been very supportive of youth there, especially girls, by providing a drop-in space for girls at the PCYC. There are a number of other programs that we help out with, including the Hong Kong exchange program that I spoke about. As of this year, the fund will cease to exist. We are now winding up that program and will not be funding the Western Australian family foundation account from this year onwards.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Considering the time, this answer may need to be provided by way of supplementary information. I refer to the fifth dot point on page 766 and the education and care regulatory unit. When will the review into the case in which two children were taken from a holiday-care centre in North Perth be completed and will it be tabled in Parliament? Are there any regulations around access gates at after-hour or holiday-care centres; and, if so, were they breached? I have a range of questions around that issue.

[12.30 pm]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Does the member want me to take that as a supplementary?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It would be good if I could be provided with that.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will provide supplementary information on the investigation into the North Perth incident.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes. What is happening with the investigation, when will it be completed, when will it be tabled in Parliament, and are there any regulations around access gates at after-hours or holiday-care centres?

[*Supplementary Information No B82.*]

The CHAIRMAN: We are dealing with division 68. The question is that the appropriation be recommended.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Thursday, 26 May 2016]

p539c-554a

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Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have a point of order.

The CHAIRMAN: All those in favour say aye.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have a point of order. The problem we have is that —

The CHAIRMAN: I am sorry; I have to put the question. All those in favour say aye; to the contrary —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The point of order is —

Ms S.F. MCGURK: It is a point of order!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is a point of order, Mr Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN: No; I have to put the question.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We are putting a division that includes the next item, yet we will be dealing with the next item separately. I believe we should be putting the division at the end of the discussion we are about to have about cemeteries.

The CHAIRMAN: Member, this is the way it is done.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, but we cannot put part 14 separately.

The CHAIRMAN: If the member has an issue with doing it this way, I suggest he put it forward to the Deputy Speaker afterwards, and we will look at it then. We cannot change it for him now.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Can I seek clarification? Before the Chairman puts the division, I have some questions relating to the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board and burials that may have reference to the department. For example, I have a couple of questions on paupers' graves. The Department for Communities—the state—previously had responsibility for paying for funerals.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That is Child Protection, not us.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is it still Child Protection?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: So it does not come into it?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is fine.

The appropriation was recommended.