

Division 1: Parliament, \$68 489 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mrs M.H. Roberts, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Ms K. Robinson, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr R. Hunter, Executive Manager, Parliamentary Services Department.

Ms P. Traegde, Deputy Executive Manager, Parliamentary Services Department.

Ms B. Corey, Director, Parliamentary Information and Education, Parliamentary Services Department.

Ms E. Ozich, Chief Finance Officer.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: Welcome everybody as we get into estimates for 2022. Before we start, I have a statement that I need to read.

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter should be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

We are dealing with division 1, Parliament. Do we have any questions? I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 43, volume 1, of the *Budget statements*. The first point refers to a new ICT platform to facilitate secure remote work. My question is to the Speaker: are you considering ways to make this a permanent ability or is this something the Procedure and Privileges Committee could further investigate in relation to whether it will be a permanent arrangement in years to come?

The SPEAKER: Thanks, member, for that question. Yes, it has been part of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we have been reasonably pleased with the way it has worked. Under our standing orders and the standing orders of Parliaments right round Australia and most Westminster Parliaments, members have to be present to vote or to be counted as having attended. There is no real proposal to change the standing orders there. In terms of the Parliament, it is my general view that members should be present when they can be. There have been plenty of occasions in the past in which people have had serious illnesses or matters come up and they are given a leave of absence, which is provided under standing orders. I do not foresee the remote facility being used for purposes other than COVID for the time being. That is always something open to the Procedure and Privileges Committee to discuss. I would also keep my mind open to what the commonwealth and other state legislatures are doing. It is good we have proven up the capacity. No-one would have predicted COVID-19 a few years ago. Who knows what the future actually holds.

There might be circumstances in the future that make it appropriate for a Parliament to make greater use of ICT, but as a general rule, with 59 members, it is certainly not something that should be optional so that people can choose to participate remotely or in person. Parliament is largely about attending in person. There may be cases or circumstances that arise in the future when that may be appropriate. Certainly, for the time being, we are still dramatically affected by COVID. I understand that ministers have parliamentary secretaries filling in for them today. We did contemplate whether a minister could participate in estimates remotely, for example. If they did, they would not have their advisers with them; therefore, their advisers would be in Parliament and the minister would be remote, which would be complicated. Again, our standing orders restrict that because the minister, effectively, forms part of the quorum, so the standing orders would need to be amended and so forth. That is why we will see over the next couple of days some parliamentary secretaries filling in for ministers or other ministers filling in for ministers. Likewise, I think, generally, because the government has the capacity to do so if it has COVID-affected members, government members are substituting with other members of the estimates committees.

The opposition, I realise, has fewer people and limited numbers and it is on that basis and subject to ongoing AV capacity—this is really about our broadcast staff and whether they have COVID or not; at the moment the AV team is clear to do it—I have approved some limited times, which I think total about six and a half hours

for Dr Honey, the member for Cottesloe and Leader of the Liberal Party, to participate remotely in the estimates process. If the opposition had more numbers, I would say somebody could potentially fill in, but in the circumstance, given we have the capacity, and we are by and large not utilising the ICT for government members, I have the capacity to allow the Leader of the Liberal Party to do that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Madam Speaker, pursuant to that, once we hopefully get through the COVID scenario, could you foresee the situation—I take on board your comments that you prefer to have people here in person—say, the member for Kimberley, for argument's sake, in two years' time coming into the house on a remote basis?

The SPEAKER: Our standing orders require people to attend in person. Parliament sits a limited number of weeks per year. We sit fewer weeks than we do not, and then we sit three days in that week. I think it is part of a member's obligation to attend Parliament and to participate in Parliament in person. If it is just as a convenience because a member does not want to participate in everything, and just wants to have a cameo appearance and give a 90-second statements and a one-off grievance because they do not feel like coming down to Parliament that week, I do not think that would measure up; it is not something I would be inclined to approve as Speaker. Future Speakers and Parliaments could make other choices, but I very firmly believe that our standing orders have it right. I do not think it is an unreasonable expectation for people to attend Parliament on the limited number of sitting days that we actually have. I would have to look—maybe Rob has them to hand—but it is about 66 days or fewer this year. I do not think it is an onerous obligation. Members really are obliged to be here every day for Parliament, not to just participate remotely in the couple of bits that feature a particular member or they just want to raise something for their constituents and not participate further. I see being in Parliament as a very big part of any elected member's responsibility.

[9.10 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As a final further question on that subject: Has a cybersecurity audit been taken of our network? How many cyber attacks have occurred since the last budget? Were any of them a major concern?

The SPEAKER: This is something that the Parliamentary Services Department and the Parliament takes very seriously. We are very alert to those threats. I might hand over to Mr Hunter to comment on some of what has occurred there, as is appropriate. Mr Hunter will know what we can disclose and what we cannot.

Mr R. Hunter: In relation to cybersecurity, we have taken extra steps in the last 12 months because we have had cyber attacks previously. The last one was two weeks before the last state election. It was a known predator, if you like, in our systems; it had been there before. In liaison with the Australian Cyber Security Centre we were able to identify what that hacker was up to and we put some things in place, including making an application for funding for cybersecurity protection, which we were fortunate to get. That meant we were able to appoint a cybersecurity officer, who started about three and a half months ago. In addition, we established a SIEM, which is basically security information and event management, which is an analysis of our system that tells us when people are doing things they should not be doing such as dropping files, executing files or maybe just sniffing our network. That is in place to give us the analytics, as well as the memorandum of understanding we have with the Australian Cyber Security Centre. In addition, the cybersecurity expert we have employed has their nose to the wheel identifying the areas we should be guarding and making sure that our current technologies are patched appropriately et cetera. All those things are in place. There has been no attack other than the attack two weeks before the election in March last year.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does Mr Hunter have any concerns that any information was compromised or the like from the particular attack he referred to?

The SPEAKER: I think on all fronts we are confident that our systems have not been compromised, but we are always alert to that threat. If Mr Hunter would like to add something, he is welcome to.

Mr R. Hunter: There is no evidence to say that any information was harvested or anything was leaked. Essentially, we identified that somebody has been watching. The Australian Cyber Security Centre has confirmed that it is not aware that any information has gone out, and that is our belief as well.

The SPEAKER: I might add that the threat and what has occurred is very much in line with what has occurred at other Parliaments and government institutions right around Australia.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the service summary table for the Legislative Assembly on page 37 of budget paper No 2. The total cost of services seems to be quite stagnant. Is the Speaker confident that that amount of money will be sufficient going forward, given that inflation will presumably affect the cost of wages et cetera? How can there not be some slight rise in that total cost of services?

The CHAIR: Madam Speaker, that question was asking for an opinion, but if you feel confident, you can answer it however you like.

The SPEAKER: I will make a couple of points. Obviously, the last year or two have been very different, and I think that is notable in several parts of the budget for the Legislative Assembly under division 1. COVID certainly

has had an impact, and it certainly has had an impact on travel by keeping people at home. It has also had an impact on extra expenditure in response to COVID. I was just discussing with the Clerk that the table on page 37 that the member referred to is largely the cost per member. To get a better idea of what is happening with our finances going forward, page 36 gives a clearer picture. I am not sure whether the member wants to look at that. I might ask the Clerk whether she wants to add something.

Ms K. Robinson: One of the things that is not showing in the forward years, but which will be added each year, is the significant drop from having carriage of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in previous years. We were given a grant of approximately \$101 000 per annum to feed through into the CPA, but that stopped last year because the administration of the CPA is now handled by the Legislative Council. That amount has dropped away for that time, but it will come back to us after the next election when we will see an increase in funding for that.

Each year we have been fortunate to receive the streamlined budget process incentive funding. In previous years, that has been one per cent of our budget, but this year it is two per cent. We are seeing an increase of approximately \$123 000 added to our budget in 2022–23. Obviously, we cannot predict how much we will get in the forward years, but that will probably come through as well.

Also, we cannot predict how much the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal increases for members will be. If we are not able to afford any increases caused by a SAT determination, we can apply for supplementary funding. In the previous election year there was a significant amount for the resettlement allowances that came through because we had an unexpected increase in members leaving at the last election, which increased our funding. We saw that spike last financial year. That was also divided between the last financial year and this financial year because some members were able to take part of that resettlement allowance in this financial year. We are seeing those sorts of effects, but we cannot predict those types of funding changes in the future.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is service 3, “Salaries and Allowances Act 1975”, all taken up with members’ payments and salaries, or does it also include certain parliamentary officers? What is actually included in that amount?

The SPEAKER: That includes the Clerk’s and the Deputy Clerk’s salaries in addition to what the member mentioned.

Mr R.S. LOVE: As well as all the members?

The SPEAKER: Yes.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Looking at service 1, “Support the Operations of the Legislative Assembly”, I note that the Legislative Council separates the committees from the operations of the chamber. Why is that approach not taken in the Assembly?

The SPEAKER: I will ask the Clerk to respond to that.

Ms K. Robinson: Each year we allocate a nominal sum for printing, advertising and those sorts of costs for committees based on the previous expenditure. We do not allocate a specific amount for them because they have their normal operating costs, but if they have any additional requirements—for example, for travel, consultants or advertising—it has to come through the Speaker and get especially approved. We cannot predict what the committees will do, but we have an unallocated amount of money that we can use for them, particularly if they wish to travel; we need to have a significant amount for that. It is up to the Speaker to approve any additional funding on top of their normal operating expenditure.

[9.20 am]

The SPEAKER: It probably originally arose out of the different systems that were run in each house that we did not use to have—the standing committee policy. The select committees were established on a more ad hoc basis whereas the Legislative Council, I think, has had a more consistent approach over many decades of having standing committees. Previously, the only standing committees for the Assembly were the public accounts and procedures and privileges committees under earlier names. That is probably the history of why it has been recorded in that way. The view of the Clerk and others has been that this has suited our purposes because although select committees are not getting approval for particular activities or travel, in some years the standing committees, because of their particular inquiries, have significantly higher costs and in other years they will have much lower costs, particularly when they do not travel or ask for money for publications and other things. We have been pretty satisfied with the way that the system has operated, not that we have had a lot of requests in the last couple of years for expenditure. Committee expenditure has been well down. The Clerk would like to add something.

Ms K. Robinson: Each year, a committee presents its annual report in about September, which includes a little breakdown of its costs over the year.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Can I ask for some clarity on whether we are allowed to ask questions on the Legislative Council in this place?

The CHAIR: No.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Can that be asked only by members of the Council in their estimates?

The SPEAKER: That is right.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That is fine. I have nothing more on that particular line.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: For further clarity, I refer to the line item on the Legislative Council budget that goes from \$19 000 in 2022–23 to \$50 000 in 2023–24. That is not —

The SPEAKER: Can I get some clarification from the Chair? It would appear that that is asking about the Legislative Council so I am not sure that we can answer that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is fine. At the bottom line, the grand total for the budget year is \$68 489 million. Over these forward estimates, there does not appear to be any real increase at all. Considering that there have been no committee trips or the like over the last two years, should we not foresee a potential increase in total expenses for the out years?

The SPEAKER: I suppose a few things are to be taken into account. There has been some additional expenditure for COVID. The money that has been saved, for example, from a lack of travel, has been spent on a variety of items that are effectively one-offs; they are not ongoing costs for the Parliament. For example, the opportunity was taken to completely refurbish the Legislative Assembly Office and that is now refurbished. It has meant that we have been able to do what otherwise might have been regarded as maintenance or something else and that money has been allocated. A number of small projects like that have been done because we have had the funds to do it. Similarly, the ICT and technology we have provided in this chamber has been a cost. In terms of the maintenance budget, we were fortunate enough to win an increase of \$500 000 per year. That has enabled, for example, the air conditioning to be fixed on this middle level right along the eastern corridor and running from south to north. I think the total cost of doing that was about \$1 million. In some of those offices the air conditioning had not worked for three or four years. That additional money has meant that we have been able to do those things. The air conditioning works required a major entry into the roof space and so forth, so the opportunity was taken to completely paint and refurbish those offices, as any member who has been in those offices will see. We have been running an ongoing program of recarpeting sections of the building and so those offices all got repainted, recarpeted and fresh air conditioning. Rather than put the tired, old furniture back into those freshly renovated offices—all the furniture was pretty old and in a pretty shabby condition, as it is in many offices throughout this building—the opportunity was taken to put new furniture in all those offices. With that money this year, for example, I am expecting that we will start to rectify the air conditioning on the ground floor entrance level and that a similar refurbishment program will happen there.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have just a short further question. As far as committee travel and the like goes, does Madam Speaker see that coming back to what it may have been prior to the COVID situation, including interstate and overseas committee travel et cetera?

The SPEAKER: Yes, I do, and I believe that we will have the capacity to deal with that. If we do not spend our budget, one of the dangers is that the budget will be reduced. We have been very prudent in getting the appropriate approvals and spending our full budget allocation rather than potentially giving money back because of the reduced travel and so forth. That budget is still there, as it always was, for people to be able to travel when it is appropriate to do so.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I want to follow up on the question around the asset investment program. The Speaker mentioned that there were some plans to do some further matters of air conditioning —

The CHAIR: Do you have a particular page number?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Sorry, I refer to page 45 and the asset investment program. The budget in 2022–23 is \$1.5 million, including \$500 000 in furniture and \$1 million in asset refurbishment and replacement. Is this the program that the Speaker mentioned and that paid for the office refurb on the east wing on the first floor?

The SPEAKER: Yes.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is there an outline of a plan going forward that is available to view so that we can see where the money is intended to be spent over the forward estimates, or is that still being worked through?

[9.30 am]

The SPEAKER: Yes, it is otherwise known as Mr Hunter's wish list. In Building Services, for example, I can run through some of those projects that have occurred and are ongoing. The Legislative Assembly's papers office had refit works totalling \$280 000. That is a complete project. There have also been costs for the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council turnstiles. Members will have seen enhanced security, particularly at the south entrance,

from our perspective. We have that capacity there. We have also had bike lockers installed. In the delivery dock a hostile vehicle mitigation barrier has been installed. There is a new footpath adjacent to the northern entry barrier. The stage 6 air conditioning works will be ongoing. Another project is the sealed car park over the tennis courts. At this stage, I understand that the only money that has been spent is in design. We are awaiting some approval from the City of Perth to provide that extra sealing over the tennis courts. As I have mentioned, there are ongoing upgrades to the air conditioning. We have had our clock system synchronised, which has a further stage to go. We have completed bus embayment and construction works that members might have noticed on Harvest Terrace. There has also been other refit and expansion works throughout the building.

There are some items that sound a bit boring, like the main plant room electrical surge protector. One that might interest members would be improved lighting in the car parks. Money has already been allocated for electric vehicle chargers and there is a belief that that will need to be expanded in the future. That is another key thing. We have also completed, as I think the member is aware, the lighting on what I think is called the fountain eastern facade, out the front of the building. Various lighting systems have been tried so that we can light the building in different colours for different causes and the like. The colours apparently get a bit washed out on the main building, but we can very effectively light what was previously the fountain area. A lot of other minor items are obviously on our agenda, anything from upgrading gym equipment to hot water pumps. The costs for IT include a program of works that includes things such as upgrading the wireless network and Webex. There is a whole range of IT things that are obviously ongoing.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a completely different question that is difficult to phrase for any particular area, but I am referring to “Relationship to Government Goals” on page 43. It is not a line item; it is a description in the Parliamentary Services section of the budget. It states —

The Department provides apolitical ancillary services to Members of Parliament ...

In doing so, it implies that it is there to support members of Parliament. I want to raise an issue of concern because of changes to the work health and safety legislation. A circular was sent to members of Parliament from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet that outlines that persons conducting a business or undertaking—PCBUs, who are responsible for conditions of work health and safety—can be the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, a member of Parliament and the Presiding Officers. Has any work been undertaken to assist members in carrying out their responsibilities, first of all, clarifying whether, indeed, they are persons conducting a business or undertaking; and, if they are, has any work been done to support members, and also the Presiding Officers, in addressing their responsibilities under the new work health and safety regime?

The SPEAKER: I am not actually sure what line item the member is referring to here. Is he just referring to a DPC policy or correspondence?

The CHAIR: Listening to the question, there is not a particular line item, but it is a question about a service that is provided possibly under the “Relationship to Government Goals” section.

The SPEAKER: There is no funding provided for what the member’s question pertains to.

The CHAIR: It is a good question, but this possibly is not the right place for it.

The SPEAKER: Budget estimates probably is not the right place.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I would suggest that there are references to service provision for the support of members. If we go back to the changes that happened under the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal, this department did some work in assisting members in working through their responsibilities on reporting under that new regime. Here we have a similar situation. There is precedent. Will there be any work in that area?

The CHAIR: Member, I will say that it is not a relevant question, but it is a question you could probably put on notice.

The SPEAKER: Or more appropriately direct it to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have written to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, but it is this department that is making the statement that members of Parliament are PCBUs. That is actually putting a very onerous situation upon members who do not have direct control of their working conditions in their offices, and also on Madam Speaker, as a Presiding Officer. I think Parliament needs to provide support for members in working through that situation. I will make that statement, leave it at that and I will be writing to the Presiding Officers further about it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the income statement on page 46 and the top line item “Employee benefits”, which is effectively static over the forward estimates. I would have thought that there would be some sort of wages growth over that period, given the economic circumstances. Does Madam Speaker have any comments on that?

The SPEAKER: I understand the member is looking at page 46, “Cost of services”, “Expenses” and the line item “Employee benefits”. There is not a lot of variation there, but the election period meant that our costs were down

for a time. There were effectively three FTE vacancies, and also less overtime and so forth was taken during that prolonged period when Parliament was not sitting between the end of one year and the calling of the election. That is one of the variation factors. We have one increase in an FTE for a cybersecurity position, a decision that was taken because of the need for it. I am quite confident that we have the appropriate expenditure. If, for example, employees were to get a wage rise, government would take that into account and provide that by way of our budget in future years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am sure those sitting around Madam Speaker would love to see a little more of an increase in the forward estimates.

The SPEAKER: Those sitting closest to me already have!

[9.40 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Regardless of that, I see in the forward estimates that the number of FTE basically stays at around 109 per annum. Given, hopefully, the COVID scenario is flattening out, does the department foresee any need to increase its staff arrangements over the next few years?

The SPEAKER: I think we have about the right number of staff. I do not see any particular need for an increase. Obviously, we needed to have someone in cybersecurity. Another example is with the changes to the electorate allowance system. There was extra demand on us there. We sought some additional funding for part of an FTE, and an additional 0.4 FTE was allocated to us so that we could assist members with the new reporting requirements to do with the electorate allowance. I am quite confident we have the staff that we need. Sometimes roles change, but we have a good team here. Short of having a major expansion, for example, in the number of members of Parliament, we do not expect an increase. If we were to go from 59 MPs to some larger number of MPs, there would potentially be a case for more staff to support those MPs, but given our role has not changed and the number of MPs has not changed, I do not foresee any immediate need to increase staffing levels.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 45 and the parliamentary services asset investment program, with total funding of \$1.5 million going forward to 2025–26. What impact will the building arrangements for new accommodation have on the budget going forward and when will we expect to see some investment in either assets or fit-out costs? I do not see any of that reflected in either the asset investment program or under cost of services on the next page. There do not seem to be any changes. I understand that the building will be occupied by the next election, roughly in 2024–25—no. Perhaps the Speaker could give us an outline of that project and whether it should actually be mentioned in the forward estimates.

The SPEAKER: I can give a breakdown of the asset refurbishment replacement program in the 2021–22 budget information. There was \$1.361 million for Parliament House air conditioning; \$720 000 for information and communications technology, including virtual desktop infrastructure, VMware host services, IT security appliances, Cisco Webex, and endpoints Oracle phase 2 and wireless network upgrades; \$257 000 for the finance management information system; \$96 000 for other, including catering equipment and Edith Cowan centenary artworks; \$91 000 for Parliament House grounds, including the bus bay, car parks, ceiling lighting, footpaths and bike lockers; \$89 000 for Parliament House lease premises, building works, office refits and repairs and maintenance; \$87 000 for the Parliament House chambers audio upgrade, hybrid Parliament and synchronised clock system; \$86 000 for security including the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council turnstiles, delivery dock barriers et cetera; and \$45 000 for the Parliament House conservation plan.

I think the conservation plan is the really relevant thing there because, as I mentioned, we got an extra \$500 000 for what is referred to as a comprehensive conservation program for the building and grounds of Parliament. That is spent on major restoration works, including stonework, windows, carpet, timber work, door replacements, roof repairs, and gas, hydraulic, fire and electrical system upgrades, plus grounds maintenance and landscaping. The asset refurbishment and replacement program has funding of \$1.5 million and that is used for all major maintenance system and replacement for building refurbishments and improvements. I think the member is referring to the potential for some major works at some point in the future, but that is not in our budget.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I understood that arrangements have been entered into to shift offices to the new building being constructed and I thought it may have fallen within the time frame of the forward estimates, in which case should it not be shown in the forward estimates?

The SPEAKER: My understanding is the building across the road will be completed in July next year and that it has not effectively been a cost to Parliament. I think it has come out of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet's budget.

The CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

The SPEAKER: To further clarify, that will be a phenomenal asset to Parliament. There will be new committee offices for both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council and we will have staff allocated over there, so that will be a major benefit to us.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A — Tuesday, 24 May 2022]

p1c-6a

Chair; Mr Peter Rundle; Speaker; Mr Shane Love

The appropriation was recommended.