

Division 58: Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia, \$34 458 000 -

Mr A.P. O’Gorman, Chairman.

Mr J.C. Kobelke, Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

Mr C.A. Hynes, Executive Director, Operational Services.

Mr F. Pasquale, Acting Executive Director, Business Services.

Ms K. Roberts, Manager, Office of the Chief Executive Officer.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Murray.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I refer to the total number of firefighters in the fire brigades service, including in the metropolitan fire service, Geraldton, Albany, Bunbury and Mandurah. I believe that the total number has increased by five in the past 12 months. What plans does the government have for increasing the number of firefighters, taking into account attrition? What sunshine can the minister place on the fire service for the people of Western Australia?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I think there is clearly a lot of sunshine because we have excellent officers who are very professional and well trained and make a fantastic commitment to look after the people of Western Australia. Since 2001, the Fire and Emergency Services Authority has had an overall increase across all firefighter ranks from 839 to 909, an increase of 8.2 per cent as at 1 May 2006. The number of firefighters on shifts has increased from 751 in May 2001 to 793 in 2006, an increase of 5.6 per cent. It is important to note that this figure does not include the 27 firefighter trainees due to graduate in July 2006. Following graduation, this will bring the number of firefighters on shift up to 820, an increase of 9 per cent since 2001.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I seek further information on the attrition rate and its effect on the overall numbers being recruited. The minister mentioned how many officers have been recruited, which is fantastic. However, I understand that, like every other service in Western Australia, officers are attracted to private enterprise. What has been done to retain those people, or pump the boat as it were? In real terms, how many additional firefighters are on the ground?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I just gave those figures.

Mr M.J. COWPER: The minister said the number had increased from 7 051 and 7 093, I think - an increase of 5.6 per cent. What does the figure of 7 051 represent?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The figure is 751. The figures I gave the member for Murray represent the actual complement of firefighters. They did not represent the recruitment. Clearly, the total complement takes account of both the attrition and the recruitment rate. That is the end, net result.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Was that from 2001?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That was from 2001 to May 2006.

Mr M.J. COWPER: That is for five years, which means eight per annum.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I mentioned that 27 firefighter trainees are due to graduate in July. A further 27 firefighter trainees will graduate in November this year.

Mr M.J. COWPER: How many have been lost this year?

Mr C.A. Hynes: We are anticipating losing 17 at this point.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The figures I have for 2005-06 anticipate a total separation of 20. That represents an attrition rate of 2.2 per cent. Compared with a lot of areas, that is very good. Of that, clearly, some people are reaching retirement age. The voluntary attrition rate is only 0.6 of one per cent for the current year.

Mr S.R. HILL: I refer to the first dot point under “Major Initiatives For 2006-07” on page 1025. Is there an allocation under this dot point for level 2 tunics for the volunteer bush brigades at local government level?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I do not have a note on volunteers, but I will seek assistance from Craig Hynes.

Mr C.A. Hynes: Operational grants of \$5.4 million have been allocated to local governments this year. They can then apportion that to their line item for the purchase of personal protective equipment relevant to their risk profile. At the moment, only four bush fire brigades in the state have a profile that affords level 2 PPE. It is not a case of budget; the budgets are allocated. Local governments can purchase the PPE relevant to their risk profile. At this stage, only four have that profile for level 2 PPE.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I refer to the response times of fire services in Western Australia and to a federal government report that was handed down last year. The report indicated that, both on the fiftieth percentile and ninetieth percentile methods of determining response times throughout the fire services in Australia, Western Australia was the worst of all the states in all categories. What will be done to improve response times?

The CHAIRMAN: Will the member for Murray please provide an item number and a page number? If it is not mentioned in the budget papers, he cannot ask it.

Mr M.J. COWPER: It is the second dot point on page 1022, which refers to the Stay and Defend or Go Early program to improve community understanding of evacuation during bushfires.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Although I cannot find the dot point, it is clearly relevant to the expenditure in that area because one of the measures of efficiency would be response time. Given that the member had asked about that in a question in the Parliament, I did have the data, although I do not have it in front of me. The national survey with which I was provided referred to the fiftieth percentile, which is a reasonable estimate of averages. The average there was just over eight minutes.

Mr M.J. COWPER: That is for the first response. The second response is the ninetieth percentile.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That is the one we were comparing, and that did not have WA comparing adversely with other places around Australia generally. I do not have the details to enable me to have an argument over those statistics.

[3.50 pm]

Mr M.J. COWPER: I will provide them to the minister.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I am happy to stand on the advice I have already given and say that the member is not accurately representing the picture with the figures he just used in his question.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I refer to the tenth dot point under "Major Achievements For 2005-06" on page 1022, which refers to the identification and inspection of high-risk premises such as backpacker and hostel accommodation. How often are these inspections carried out? Are they yearly inspections?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Clearly that is an achievement. I ask Mr Craig Hynes to help me with responding to that question.

Mr C.A. Hynes: A dedicated group of community safety officers have the charter to identify every category of accommodation in the state. They will eventually inspect all those premises, and then pass on the details to the local government and our local regional offices. They will all be inspected for safety and provided with a checklist for improvements in any areas that we identify.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 4.00 to 4.05 pm