

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

**2012–13 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARINGS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
MONDAY, 18 JUNE 2012**

**SESSION ONE  
DEPARTMENT FOR CHILD PROTECTION**

**Members**

**Hon Giz Watson (Chair)  
Hon Philip Gardiner (Deputy Chair)  
Hon Liz Behjat  
Hon Ken Travers  
Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich**

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**Hearing commenced at 2.05 pm**

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY**  
**Minister for Child Protection, examined:**

**Mr TERRY MURPHY**  
**Director General, sworn and examined:**

**Ms KAY BENHAM**  
**Executive Director, Policy and Learning, sworn and examined:**

**Mr PETER BYRNE**  
**Executive Director, Corporate and Business Services, sworn and examined:**

**Ms PHILIPPA BEAMISH BURTON**  
**Manager, Management Accounting, sworn and examined:**

**Mr JAY PECKITT**  
**Director, Business Support and Coordination, sworn and examined:**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome this afternoon. Before we open this hearing I would like to acknowledge the delegation from the Cook Islands who are joining us here in Western Australia to learn a little about how the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations works, so welcome to the hearing this afternoon. I hope everything will run smoothly.

On behalf of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations I would like to welcome you to the hearing this afternoon. Before we begin I ask the public servants to either take the oath or affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

**The CHAIR:** You will have signed a document titled “Information for Witnesses”. Have you read and understood this?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** The hearing is being held in public this afternoon, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private of its own motion or at the request of a witness. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during this afternoon’s proceedings, please request the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question. Government agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting Parliament to scrutinise the budget papers on behalf of the people of Western Australia and we value your assistance this afternoon. Proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. It would greatly assist Hansard if when referring to the *Budget Statements*, volumes or consolidated account estimates that you give the page number, item, program, amount and so on in preface to your question. If supplementary information is to be provided, I ask your cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the committee clerk within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. Should you be unable to meet this due date please advise the committee clerk immediately. The committee reminds agency representatives to respond to questions in a succinct manner and to limit the extent of personal observations. For the benefit of members and Hansard I ask the minister to introduce her advisers to the committee.

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[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** I will prioritise questions from committee members, but I also recognise questioners from the Labor Party and the Greens.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Pages 703 and 704 of budget paper No 2 list the employee numbers. The minister would be familiar with the statement that the then Treasurer issued on 17 April in which he talked about all agencies being required to operate for the next two financial years inside their FTE cap as it was set in 2011–12. I wonder whether the minister can confirm what the numbers are to meet that cap.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes. I will hand you over to our director to answer that question. To the best of my knowledge it is 2 230, but I will hand over to the director.

**Mr Murphy:** Our cap in 2011–12 is actually 2 216, but there was an additional allocation of 14 FTEs made, I think, in 2010–11, which is part of the three-year rollout of the Responsible Parenting program to regional Western Australia, so as a result our cap this year goes up to 2 230.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Still on the question of FTE numbers, I understand that there is to be a degree of engagement between the Premier's office and the department about FTE numbers. What can you tell me about that review?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** There is always engagement about FTE numbers when you go into the budget process, and then you go back for another talk about budgetary matters and FTEs. If I can just go back to 2007–08 because I am —

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Minister, I am actually asking about the Premier's review.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, I know you are, and this is how I am answering it. In 2007–08 there were 528 caseworkers and 424 other delivery FTEs. In 2008–09 there were 677 caseworkers and 321 other service delivery FTEs. In 2009–10 there were 689 caseworkers, in 2010–11 there were 731 and now there are 778 caseworkers, I believe. Is that correct? I was just going back and putting into perspective how many children we have in care at the moment as opposed to 2007–08 when there were 3 011 and in April 2012 when there 3 785. We have gone up from, as I said, 528 caseworkers to 778. But the overall total—I will get back to the member's question now—is 2 230. I will certainly, if I find that we have a need for more caseworkers, to look at our organisational structure because there is nothing to stop us from getting caseworkers within the organisational structure, then I will go back to the process and say that this is what we need to look at.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Perhaps I can go back to the original question: can you explain to me the scope of the involvement of the Premier's department in reviewing the FTE numbers of the department?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will ask the director to answer that.

**Mr Murphy:** There has been no further work on that since it was determined that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet would work with us on our service delivery mix. They are the terms in which it has been put. Essentially, this means that while we have growth funding to help us meet demand we have a static FTE ceiling. In order to deploy our growth funds optimally and meet our case management requirements, it is beholden on us—Premier and Cabinet will involve themselves in this process to a degree yet to be determined—to look at our service mix so that we can, as the minister indicated, where we need additional caseworkers adjust what we do, potentially, initially, and should that be the case to have more caseworkers where they are needed.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Is it the expectation that the review—that might be too strong a word but I will use that word for convenience—is an exercise in looking at how we can generate more FTEs or is it an exercise in justifying exactly what you have right now or is it an exercise of the Premier's department saying what they think you could do with fewer FTEs?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I do not believe anyone in the Premier's department thinks we can do with fewer FTEs—certainly not while I am the minister, thank you very much! We have a cap. Every department has a cap. As I said, there is nothing to stop me from looking within our organisational structure and having more caseworkers. As you know, we do not run to full capacity. We do have positions available at present and we can look within our organisation to fill those if we need to.

[2.17 pm]

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** If I may, I appreciate the organisation itself can always look, and, in fact, should always be looking, within itself about how it can do things better, but the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is not engaged with every department looking at FTEs, so there is something that they are doing with the Department for Child Protection that they are not doing with other agencies. So what is your understanding of what the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is looking for out of Child Protection?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** My understanding of what Premier and Cabinet is looking at is, when I go to the budget process, I never leave there without getting what I consider to be a fair and equitable deal for workers and for the children in our care. So my understanding is that there is a cap; there is another figure that is over the 2 230. I will just ask the director.

**Mr Murphy:** The cap is only one figure in how we manage FTEs, because, as the minister indicated, we do carry vacancies. In order to manage those vacancies, for example—I think this has been explained to this committee last year—we fund a slightly greater number of FTEs than our cap and we hold a number of positions which are slightly greater again. All of this is designed so that we can use our FTEs as flexibly as possible and move it around the organisation as needs be in order to reduce that number of caseworker and service delivery vacancies. So, as the minister indicated, we are currently—I was just checking how many caseworker vacancies we have got—carrying 40. Forty out of 780 approximately is not insignificant, so there is still some room to meet any excess demand that we might have in that area.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Can I just say that, if you are getting at that we do not have enough caseworkers, we actually do have enough caseworkers. Casework is set at 15 cases per caseworker and, at present, I think we are at 12.4 for caseworkers carrying cases. But, certainly, if I thought that that was changing, the director and I would sit down and I would be the first one to take it to a review to say that we need more. As you know, Hon Sue Ellery, the children in our care are first and foremost with me as the minister, and certainly we have a very stable workforce now, unlike some years ago when the department was in critical trouble. We have a workforce that is very stable now.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Just in relation to the FTEs for a start, what is the FTE ceiling for the agency at the current time?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is 2 230.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Okay, and you have got 2 216 currently employed, is it? What have you got so far in the agency as FTEs?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** As FTEs? It is 2 209.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** From previous evidence we have got, the efficiency dividend you have got, which is a little bit less than two per cent based on the quotient which I was told —

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** A little bit less than what?

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** A little bit less than two per cent, which I understand was meant to be in the 2012–13 financial year. I presume that there must have been something taken out of the service appropriations to bring the quotient down from what is there at the current time as \$448.311 million to something lower because the two per cent is currently one and a half based on

2012–13. Sorry; I may have the wrong number. For 2012–13 it might be 2.5 per cent, so that is more than two per cent.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** No? Let me just do the quotient again. The number is \$7 607 000, or maybe I have got my years mixed up, have I? Just bear with me. So, \$7 607 000 divided by \$471 930 is 1.6 per cent.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes; that is dead right.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** So why is it lower than two per cent?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Because I am a very good minister.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** No, I do not want to have that. That is a value judgement of your own; that is even worse! Can I have someone else talk about that?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Besides, there are rules against misleading the Parliament!

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I am not misleading anybody.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** No; I did not imply that. I just want to hear it from somebody apart from you.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** When I was negotiating with Treasury, I am a very good negotiator, and it has come down to 1.6 per cent, plus there was another \$3.5 million rolled over from last year. That \$3.5 million is just sitting there and that will be used for front-line services as well. It is certainly 1.6. I will hand over to the director to put his spin on it.

**Mr Murphy:** This reflects the fact that all non-government services were excised from the base on which the two per cent was calculated.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Exactly.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** So what has that got to do with ministerial negotiations?

**Mr Murphy:** It did not happen out of thin air.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** So you were the one who negotiated that for all the NGOs across the government, were you? Well done!

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Thank you. For the record, Hon Sue Ellery is being totally sarcastic. I actually negotiate a very good deal for the Department for Child Protection with Treasury.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** So with the \$8.2 million, that is more than the 2 208 I think you said were the FTEs now.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is 2 209.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Sorry; 2 209 and 2 230. That is 21. Let us say it is \$2.1 million. What we were told in evidence from other agencies is that the efficiency dividend should be reasonably easy to fulfil for each agency because the FTEs employed were less than the ceiling, and that is the case with you, excepting that it is only about \$2.1 million, assuming each FTE is \$100 000. So where are the other \$6 million of cuts going to come from?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Those cuts will be worked out with the director and myself as to where they will come from. I certainly do not subscribe to the position that efficiency cuts are easy; they are never easy. However, when the federal government starts cutting into our GST as they have, money has to come from somewhere and, unfortunately, I had to take some pain.

Just getting back to the last question, and then I will come back to yours, about negotiating the non-government, yes, I did go in very hard and say about the non-government services that are in my department —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Why did you not say that in answer to the question up-front?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I am telling you now that I did go in very, very hard on the non-government services. I had a bit of sarcasm coming from Hon Sue Ellery and just I want you to know —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** After you had gone on without answering the question. If you had said at the beginning it is because that has been handed out —

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** It was you misleading the committee. You did not tell the whole story to the committee and you know you did not.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Stop wasting time.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No, I am not wasting time.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Just back to the \$6 million if we can, minister. I do not know how much of the \$471.9 million is for front-line services. What percentage roughly is for front-line services in that particular sum?

**Mr Murphy:** I think we are looking at each other here. Calculations vary, but —

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Just roughly.

**Mr Murphy:** Our corporate services are very low. I would say 90 per cent, including that which we contract to the non-government sector.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** The concern is that this \$6 million is going to come from front-line services, or have you made a policy decision internally that it can only be from the back office? How do you see yourselves managing that?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Front-line services are out of bounds. I can just tell you that I secured \$15 million for children in care for our front-line services there, which has never, ever happened in the history of Child Protection before. There has never, ever been \$15 million given for that, plus the \$3.5 million that was rolled over from last year, which is an incredible \$18.5 million. That has never happened in the history of Child Protection. That will be used for children in care and all our front-line services. That is our demand funding—our \$15 million. It is not our intention to take money off front-line services, and that is a policy that you have heard the Treasurer say and you have heard the Premier say.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** What sections of the department are not front-line services?

**Mr Murphy:** Corporate services; policy; in some definitions, learning. Essentially, it is corporate, policy. The working with children unit gets variably defined as either service delivery or not, depending on whether that is in the equation.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Are you able to tell us how much is actually allocated for each of those four areas now in the budget, because I assume that they are all rolled across the different service deliveries? Are you able to actually break down the budget in each of those four areas? I think you have only got three service delivery areas; is that correct? It is three, because of the responsible financial management being the four. How much is actually allocated for corporate, learning, policy and working with children in each of those areas?

**Mr Murphy:** We are just confirming that we would have to take that on notice, because it varies across the different areas. The actual corporate services, which is a strong organisational benchmark, is about six per cent.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So, it is six per cent of your total budget.

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**Mr Murphy:** Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No A1.*]

[2.30 pm]

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I am actually going to stick to the 10 per cent suggested before as being the broad perspective of your overheads. That is \$47.2 million roughly of the 2012–13 budget based on page 709. If I take the \$6 million, I think it is, over \$47 million, which is about 12.5 per cent. So about 12.5 per cent of your overheads are exposed to the efficiency dividend efficiencies, if you like. That is a pretty tough amount to achieve. What will be the implications of that if you are able to make that 12.5 per cent cut? Where is the shoe going to pinch?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** That is something that the director and I have not decided yet. We have been in discussions, and it will take a little while to work that out. That is not something that we can go, “Yes, we are going to take off here and take off there.” We realise we have got the Department for Child Protection and we have to look very, very carefully at where we can make savings.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I know we have not got the proportion, because that is on notice now, about how much is in that policy area, but I would presume the policy area could be pretty well set for the next two or three years. I suppose you could reduce some of the resources in that area. Is the policy area pretty well set for the next two or three years?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, we have had a huge reform in the last four years in Child Protection and our policies are fairly well set. I will hand you over to the director and he can talk about Signs of Safety and certainly in the staff area where policy is concerned.

**Mr Murphy:** I think one of the achievements of the department over the recent period has been to get very clear about what it does and to have strong, accessible documentation both to assist the department in doing what it does and the public in understanding what we do and our clients. Our service delivery frameworks and our case practice manual are all on the internet and are all open to scrutiny. I think it was no mean feat to reduce our case practice guidance from seven lever-arch files to one and to have that as a useful document available electronically as well. Our policy and service delivery directions are well set, and that is not to be underestimated in a department like ours which tends to be subject to the vicissitudes of fashion, and when anything goes wrong, people call for a 180-degree turn in how the business is done, forgetting that it is actually an uncertain, anxiety-ridden business based on human beings, because behaviour one cannot entirely control, no matter how many FTEs you have got. As I say, it is really important that our directions are well set but it is equally important that we continue to review and refine those practice guidance materials, policy and resources and very particularly learning resources, because our staff are always learning. We as an organisation can always do things better. It is a long answer, I appreciate, but it does boil down to, yes, a lot of policy direction is set and so we are not going through the massive reform process we have been through over recent years and that does reduce some demand on our policy resource, but we continue to review and refine what we do.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** That is helpful. I will come back to some other questions later.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** I have some questions on 701, but just on page 699 following on a little bit from what Hon Phil Gardiner was saying there under “Major Spending Changes”, is “Sustainable Funding and Contracting with the Not-For-Profit Sector” and “Sustainable Funding and Contracting with the Not-for-Profit Sector — Homelessness”. I notice that those moneys are allocated. Can you just confirm for me that that forms part of the \$604 million that was allocated generally in last year’s budget for the not-for-profit sector, and that is this department’s share of that money? If that is the case, can you confirm that that is not going to be touched with regard to the efficiency dividend?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Thank you for the question. As you have already said, \$600 million was provided over four years to ensure a sustainable not-for-profit sector and to address a shortfall in the amount paid to the sector by government for the valuable services that NGOs provide. You were talking about the additional funding of \$8.6 million?

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Yes, for this, and then I have got \$46.5 million over the out years.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, so the \$8.6 million in 2011–12 allowed for an up-front price adjustment of the 15 per cent for eligible services, and that excluded homelessness. I do not think that is what you asked.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Can you just confirm that is part of the \$604 million and that it is not going to be subject to anything with regard to the efficiency dividend?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I do not believe it is, but I will just get that confirmed.

**Ms Beamish Burton:** The \$8.6 million was the first amount, and the homelessness was not included in the \$600 million; it was on top of that. They had to wait for the Fair Work Australia decision before they allocated that money.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Yes, but in 2012–13 there is \$8.976 million allocated for that sector and \$4.231 million for homelessness, but then there is a \$7.6 million efficiency dividend.

**Ms Beamish Burton:** When the efficiency dividend was calculated, that was excluded.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** So it is excluded?

**Ms Beamish Burton:** Yes.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** And it will continue to be excluded in those calculations?

**Ms Beamish Burton:** Yes.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** That is what I wanted to know; that is great. I am passionate that all of that \$604 million goes to where it is meant to be going. Page 701, if I could take you to the dot points there, the seventh dot point down states —

A new inter-agency program has commenced for young people with exceptionally complex needs who require longer term specialised placements.

Am I seeing here what I think is—it is interesting because it is a conversation that my colleague and I have had outside of this place, where previously we have had sort of silo funding of various things, and now we are trying to break down the silos and actually have one group coordinating this exceptionally complex needs area. If that is the case, well done. But also is DCP the lead agency for that? Can you explain, and where in the budget can I find the moneys allocated to that program?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, we are the lead agency. The Department for Child Protection has always worked very well with the disabilities commission, and we have always worked together very well. So, the young people with exceptionally complex needs are those who are up to 17 years who have severe and chronic problems in one or more areas of functioning that present an imminent and critical danger of harm to themselves and others. They are young people who have two or more of the following—it is important to spell that out—they have either have a mental illness, an acquired brain injury, an intellectual disability and/or a significant substance abuse problem. They require intensive support and benefit from receiving coordinated services, and are people for whom the system is not working. So, yes, we do work together. They not only require services from Disability and from us, but other government agencies have been spoken to. They have senior representation from our department and Disability, the Mental Health Commission, the Department of Housing, the Department of Health, Child and Adolescent Mental Health, the Department of Education, the Department of Corrective Services, Youth Justice, the Drug and Alcohol Office and the Office of the Public Advocate. This group identifies that young people to be assisted by the program and approves the services or funding required.

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A coordinator for young people with exceptionally complex needs has recently been appointed and is employed and managed by our department. The coordinator is to develop comprehensive plans to support the young people on the program and convene a young person's services team to implement these plans. That team will be drawn from across the participating agencies on a case-by-case basis. We have three young people identified at present. So they are exceptionally, extremely complex young people.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Okay, but that sounded like helluva of a lot of people that you just read out. I am assuming there will be a smaller group that will actually manage that. The coordinator that has been appointed, can you just run through the qualifications of that person—what level are they at and how is this actually going to work? To me, if this is what it is—a breakdown of silos—it is a really great way of doing things and it is new, so I would like to know exactly how that program is and how we envisage that working, because I think you could be making some inroads into an area that we have not done before.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Thank you. We certainly do need to make some inroads. I am quite excited about this program because with the coordinator working with these exceptionally complex children, they are not going to be left outside the tent. We can bring them in and really work with them. I will hand over to the director to talk about what qualifications they —

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Also, I asked about the line item in the budget where we might look for the funding for it.

**Mr Murphy:** The coordinator is a social worker. She has joined us from the Disability Services Commission where she —

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Is that on a secondment or has she come straight —

**Mr Murphy:** No, it is a permanent appointment. The position is jointly funded by ourselves, Disability, and the Mental Health Commission. That is the first breakdown of silo funding, if you like, but we manage it and we are the FTE.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** So it comes out of your FTE allocation, and those other two departments pay money across and you completely manage it?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** That is great!

**Mr Murphy:** The committee is worth re-emphasising again, because it actually comprises CEOs of the agencies, particularly Disability and the Mental Health Commission, so it really indicates the importance with which those core organisations see the management of these children. As you indicated, it is quite a large list of involved agencies, but it is those three—Mental Health Commission, ourselves and Disability—that are the main agencies. The funding for each child is considered on an individual basis. First, though, it is not a funding program as such. It is really about making the system work better for each child, bringing in existing resources and existing effort to bear in a more coordinated way or in reality a much greater way for some of these kids. That said, though, we anticipate a number of them will be able to benefit from individualised funding from each of the agencies with the potential for either pooling that or managing it as a virtual pool to manage different aspects of the care of these young people.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I actually wanted to follow on from that same dot point, because I had some questions as well. I want to know: is this related to the PECN program which has been running for a number of years from the Mental Health Commission, which I understand received a large proportion of funding from the federal government. Is it related to that?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The program is modelled on the program you are talking about, but this is specific to us and our agencies.

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**Hon ALISON XAMON:** What I am interested in was you stating that you are taking the lead agency role. I had noticed that you had not been able to find any PECN funding within the Mental Health Commission budget for this financial year, which is something I had been looking at, something I have actually raised in previous estimates. You are not here to answer the Mental Health Commission's estimates, but I am curious to know whether that program has effectively ceased. I do remember there had not been forward estimates money for that program and it simply had been taken over by emergency with a focus on children, because I am aware that previously the PECN project has very much focused on adults.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** You are right. I cannot answer for the Mental Health Commission, because I just have no knowledge of that federal funding, but this is our program and we work at a state level with Mental Health and Disability. I am the lead agency, and the funding comes out our Child Protection money. I am sorry; I just cannot answer for Mental Health. Maybe the director can answer a bit more.

[2.45 pm]

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Of course, minister; absolutely. I completely understand that, as I said. What I am trying to figure out is whether this program is actually over and above the existence of that program which is dealing with adults with complex needs or whether it is actually an offshoot of that program that is happening in addition to.

**Mr Murphy:** I think we would describe it as over and above but modelled on the adult process. My understanding, given how closely we work with disability and mental health, is that the adult People With Exceptionally Complex Needs has just doubled its capacity, employed a second coordinator —

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Yes, there is a huge need.

**Mr Murphy:** — and that is funded on a cooperative basis by the agencies in the same way as Young People with Exceptionally Complex Needs is funded on a cooperative basis by the agencies.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** So how many young people are you estimating are likely to be picked up by this program?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** About 10, I think.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** So you have budgeted for 10?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, 10 young people.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** That is 10 per year, presumably, and hopefully there will be success and turnover.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** As I said before, I am quite excited about this program so that we can get those young people and start to work with them, and not a lot of agencies coming in over the top. So if we are the lead agency and there is a coordinator, we can work with them, and I think you will find an improvement. It is a start—10. I know that there is a great need out in the community, as you said, for it, but we are starting, and hopefully we have got something that will work really well for these young people with exceptional needs.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** So how are young people to be selected for this program?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I suspect they self-select.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes. I was actually going to say that, and then I thought, “Oh, that doesn't sound very good”, but it is the truth.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I suppose what I really meant—and, sadly, Hon Sue Ellery is correct—but what I am asking is: how will the department be determining those 10 children, because the need, undoubtedly, is greater than 10?

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**Mr Murphy:** It is the case that the most difficult cases rise to the top and become evident, but we have been through a pretty big process with this. It is a bit like the Booker Prize. You develop a long list that comprises something like 100 children of the most difficult placements in each of our districts, which we have whittled down to a short list of around 30, who are seriously difficult children in terms of the amount of harm they pose to themselves or the community and, therefore, the challenge in providing a stable placement and all that entails in terms of safety and their own development. Then the committee itself, which includes, as I said, the CEOs of mental health and the Disability Services Commission and me, literally make the choice of those people who are participating. It is a capacity of 10. We have taken on three to begin with, and we will run two months with the first three, two months with the second three, and two months with the next three, so that they are not all coming all at once. It is really important to recognise, too, that these children are not coming from a zero position; they are not just rattling out there in the community, hurting themselves and other people. They are in placements; they are being managed, but the key thing about this program is: can a very focused, coordinated interagency effort, with some more resources perhaps, make a real difference to the stability of that placement, safety of community and wellbeing of the young person?

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I was hoping—and I am happy to take this on notice—I suppose I do not need to because I was going to ask what other agencies are putting in. Actually, could I have that on notice, how much exactly other agencies are putting in for this program?

**Mr Murphy:** I can do it straight off.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I have already given you the other agencies that are in it.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** You have; you have listed all the other agencies.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Do you want a breakdown of money?

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Yes, please. I am happy to take that on notice.

**Mr Murphy:** It is just the coordinator that is being paid for initially, and that is a third from mental health, a third from disability and a third from us. Then it is on a case-by-case basis, and we have not made additional allocations at this stage.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** What is a social worker at, though?

**Mr Murphy:** Sorry; it is level 6, which is a specified calling 3—the new regime of specified callings, 3.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Specified calling —

**Mr Murphy:** Specified calling 3, which is the old level 6. We pitched it at a level equivalent to a team leader in our system.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Does the program actually have a name?

**Mr Murphy:** Young People with Exceptionally Complex Needs.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** YPECN.

**Mr Murphy:** YPECN

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** And the one that has been going for a while is PECN.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Can I just go to page 699, under “Major Spending Changes”, line item four, HUGS. Why is there no figure for the 2011–12 estimated actual and why is there no provision for HUGS funding in the forward estimates?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** As part of the 2012–13 budget, the HUGS has increased to \$11.7 million, and the department recently undertook a procurement process to contract financial

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counselling services across the state. In 2008, I think there was a \$24.4 million package over four years to help households experiencing utility hardship. The funding allocation, as I said, was \$11.7 million, which comprises \$9.36 million for HUGS grants, \$2.139 million for financial counselling and \$0.201 million for administration.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Are you saying that is for this financial year?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I have got the major spending changes, so what I am looking at is a figure here of \$7 640 000, so I am trying to make sense of that in the context of the figures you just gave me.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Of the \$11.7 million, \$4.6 million is ongoing funding provided since the 2008–09 budget, and \$7.64 million has been provided for the 2012–13 years, in addition to the base funding to meet expected demand for the HUGS grants and financial counselling services.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** There is quite an increase required. Can I move on to page 701, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, and the third dot point. This is on page 701. I am wondering whether there is any new money to support informal carers—for example, grand-carers?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** That is actually in the Department for Communities, the carers and grand-carers, so if you are here during the Department for Communities, I will answer that. But it is certainly not in the Child Protection —

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Right; it is just because that refers to foster carers. That is why I asked it.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Okay; sorry. We provide \$1 000 to our—sorry, different —

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I am aware of that —

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** — and I was aware of that payment. What I am asking you is whether there is any new money.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No, there is no new money.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Okay. If I can go on to the fifth dot point, outsourcing case management to NGOs, I am wondering how many cases is it estimated that this will involve, what sort of savings are anticipated and whether it is a trial?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** We agreed to pilot the delegation of case management to community sector agencies —

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** So it is a trial?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** — and the pilot project will involve four community sector agencies and 34 children who are in the CEO’s care until 18 years, but they are in long-term stable placements and where there are no contentious case management issues. It is anticipated that the pilot will commence after June 2012.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** So how long is it anticipated this pilot will go for?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Twelve months, and then we will have a look and reassess.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I am assuming it is going to be evaluated.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is evaluated after 12 months.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** What savings are anticipated as a result; and, also, could you tell me the four agencies?

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**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Wansley Family Services, Parkerville, Yorganup and MercyCare are the four agencies.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** What sort of savings are we talking about?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The department has allocated \$150 000, but you must realise that these agencies have wanted to do this for a long time, so that is why we are having this trial. But it will save 2.5 FTE.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** What is the mechanism to ensure cases are returned to department management if something difficult or unforeseen occurs?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I imagine—I do not imagine; I know that if something unforeseen or difficult occurs, it will go straight back to the department.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** So you are anticipating the contractual arrangements will enable that flexibility to be able to quickly resume —

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes; and do not forget that I did say that these are long-term stable children —

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Yes, I did hear you say that.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** — and that is the crux of this. We are not just going to, certainly not while I am minister, anyway—this is a trial with long-term stable children placements.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Moving on, again under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, the fourth dot point, out-of-home care placements, could you please provide some information about the placements—where they are available and how long are children, on average, spending in these placements?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The funding provided to the community sector for out-of-home care services has increased by over 450 per cent; so it has increased greatly under this government.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** That was not what I was asking; I was asking for some more information about the placements themselves. How long are children, on average, spending in them; the average age of the children that are in these placements? I am happy to take that on notice if it is easier.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It just depends really. So I will hand you over to the director. But we cannot control the ages of children coming into care.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** No. I am just wanting the information about it.

**Mr Murphy:** We contract three areas to the non-government sector. General placements for foster children in general who require nothing over and above a normal placement arrangement: the age of those children, and the length of time in those placements, is exactly parallel to those placements that are provided by the department, and in measuring we do not differentiate. We monitor the contracts and we work with those agencies very closely. But essentially they are the same as the placements we provide directly. The second area is what we call family group homes, where there are live-in carers supported by staff of the agency in houses that we provide to the agency. So, really that is a residential care arrangement, but at the low end of intensity, because it relies predominantly on live-in carers. There were 144 of those placements created out of the reform and expansion of residential care, and most of those are operating. Some are operating in temporary premises in the country, but most of them are up and running. The idea there is that those placements are eligible for all ages, but they tend towards younger children, and they tend towards sibling groups. The idea is that those arrangements are for a two-year period. That is not hard and fast, because if we can achieve a transition to foster care or a reunification with family earlier than that, we will do so; and, similarly, if this is a stable arrangement for a longer period, we will not disrupt it. But, optimally, all residential care looks at two years.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Right. That is the answer.

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[3.00 pm]

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Can I just further add to that? Since 2007–08, funding for the out-of-home care services provided by the community sector has increased from \$11.7 million to an anticipated \$53.2 million in 2011–12; so, in percentage terms, I have now given you the actual figure, which has increased greatly.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** In relation to the final dot point again on page 701, I am interested in some more information on the impact that the lack of affordable accommodation has had on the work of the department. Particularly I would like to know in what percentage of the cases of children coming into the department's care is housing or lack of housing a factor in the department's decision to take these children into care.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Certainly lack of housing is one problem. If we can put mums with children into refuges or into housing, that is just one part of it. But I will hand over to the director to answer your question more fully.

**Mr Murphy:** There is no question that affordability of housing is one pressure on vulnerable households. You may have read the sorts of numbers that I was reading in the newspaper on the weekend, where rents in Perth, and regional Western Australia, have increased at a greater rate than in any other capital city, and vacancy rates are lower. So that does create pressures when households are vulnerable; there is no question of that. I would venture to say that income management is a very important tool there that can at least get the rent paid, whether in a public tenancy or a private. The extent to which homelessness impacts on children coming into care is not possible to quantify without trawling through all our case files and making the calculations. It is not a recorded statistic, because you would not give due weight to that factor relative to any other factors, such as drug and alcohol or domestic violence, that are operating at the time. But there is no doubt that anecdotally, homelessness is cited as a factor affecting families' capacity to provide safety for their children in a significant number of cases—by no means the majority, and by no means even a large minority, but in a significant number of cases this is one of the factors that is affecting families.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** If I can make a comment and ask a further question, I suppose I am concerned to hear that the issue of homelessness is not factored in as data that you attempt to quantify, because I would have imagined that as a matter of public policy it is really important to be able to have an understanding of to what degree the issue of homelessness is impacting on child protection matters. Anecdotally, I have been alarmed to have people contact my office who are deeply distressed because they have had their children removed from them—their children are currently in care—and they are saying that they came to the attention of Child Protection when they effectively became homeless and that the response of Child Protection then was to actually remove the children; and if you can imagine, that then brings along an avalanche of other complicating factors that often happen when someone who is already desperate then has their children removed. So I would like to hear your comments in relation to that, please, and also whether there is any capacity to start monitoring the numbers around homelessness and child protection intersections into the future.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Look, we do not take people's children off them lightly. That is the first thing I will say to you. The second thing is homelessness is one issue in a range of factors as to whether children are taken into care. We spend \$28 million on 37 refuges; and many people have families that they can go to. I do not think the department is the ogre that some people try and make it out to be. Certainly the social workers and the workers in the Department for Child Protection would firstly try to help the mother who comes in homeless and has children. But first and foremost, they look and see what the situation is, if they can help, if those people can go to relatives, if there is a refuge, or if somebody can help them. Everything has to be assessed, right down to whether the mum is an alcoholic, the mum is on drugs, the mum has a violent partner, the

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mum is escaping domestic violence. There is a whole raft of social issues and very critical issues that have to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. So if a mum were to come in off the street with her children and say “I’m homeless”, they would do—“they” being the departmental workers—a detailed analysis. Sometimes mums are homeless—and people are homeless through no fault of their own in many, many cases. But we have to look at why they are homeless and see if the children are in danger. If the children are not in danger, then the department has a look and sees where it is best to place mum and the children together. So it is not a case of we just look and think, “You’re homeless; we’re taking your children off you”. The days of that have long gone. I would hope, and I believe, that the staff whom we have now in Child Protection are very good people, and they are very detailed in their analysis of who is presenting in front of them.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Page 706, income statement, expenses, refers to the \$15 million that you pointed to earlier, minister, about cost and demand pressures. I want to ask about the demand model that has been in place for some time now. I understand it is the case that Treasury wants to review that demand model. Can you tell me about the scope of what Treasury wants to do with the demand model?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Firstly, there was some talk when I presented at budget about the demand model, because we have gone up—I am not sure whether it is 52 per cent or 57 per cent—since the Liberal–National government has been in power since I have been minister. So if it keeps on going like that, I could have a budget that is 100 per cent funded. So I think Treasury wants to look at the demand model. I do not know anything more than that. They have not said or suggested what they would look at if it was not a demand model, but you can be sure I will be in there getting my fair share—our fair share—for the department, like I always do, and I will be looking very closely at if they do change that model, what model they would go to. But it has not been made clear to me that they are going to change it. They said that they were going to look at the demand model that they had in front of them.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** So further to Treasury raising that in the course of the budget negotiations, has there been any contact from Treasury about how they are going to do that examination?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will hand over to the director.

**Mr Murphy:** We have had our first meeting with Treasury, and really that was an exploratory meeting to reacquaint them with the model —

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Which they approved in the first place.

**Mr Murphy:** Which they collaborated on—we remind them of that, endlessly. It was a collaborative effort to establish the model. But of course people change, and memories fade. So the first necessity is to revisit the model and its parameters, and make sure that the current people in Treasury understand it, and then we began to consider other broader issues. Broader issues might be the extent to which investing in our family support service—service 3—prevents people coming into our child protection service, and, in turn, investing in that prevents children coming into care. Can that be quantified? Can that be built into the model? Is the differential growth in different regions of the state, such as the Pilbara, and anticipated in the Murchison, for example, adequately reflected in the cost elements of the demand model? Are the cost elements per se reflected? I think those issues are indicative of issues raised by both ourselves and Treasury in looking at a model that is now four or five years old. So we very much welcome the opportunity to review it with Treasury. It is a good model, and we are confident it will mean a slightly better model that is presented into the budget process next year.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Do you have a time line for that? Are you meeting weekly, fortnightly or monthly? What is the scope of the work?

**Mr Byrne:** We are still working on the terms of reference for the review, but we will be meeting regularly to have it finalised for the next budget process—by November.

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**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I want to go back to the then Treasurer's statement on 17 April, where he talked about the deferral of spending on a range of capital works projects across a number of agencies. Are there any capital works projects in the Department of Child Protection that have been captured by that?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No. We are going on with our capital works program.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I refer to page 707, the income statement. In the last line of that first table is the surplus/deficiency for the period. A deficit has been factored in for each of the out years, 2013–14, 2014–15 and 2015–16. What do you attribute that deficit to—is it the efficiency dividend, or is it something additional to that?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The \$2.852 million increase in surplus from the 2011–12 budget to the 2011–12 estimated actual is due to the following items—so that is a surplus/deficiency for the period—\$7.39 million of natural disaster support payments relating to 2010–11 reimbursed during the 2011–12 financial year; \$3.851 million of 2010–11 underspend for the Kath French secure care facility was approved for carryover into 2011–12 to be utilised for the department's IT support and infrastructure shortfall; and \$0.687 million of 2010–11 underspend for royalties for regions expansion of responsible parenting programs approved for carryover in 2011–12.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** So in terms of the out years, which is what I actually asked about?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The out years. Sorry. I thought that I would lead into the 2010–11 deficit. The department's deficit for the 2010–11 financial year was \$14.6 million. The deficit was primarily due to the unexpected expenditure associated with the provision of services to people affected by natural disasters. I have a note here to say —

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** It is the out years that I am looking at.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is primarily accrued salaries, and I will hand over to Philippa now. I am sorry about that. I apologise.

**Ms Beamish Burton:** It is basically accrued salaries. The way it is calculated is that we do not get funding, but we are accruing for it. So it is mainly just accruals for those years.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Is it accruals for the twenty-seventh pay or is it accruals for leave loadings and other liabilities?

**Ms Beamish Burton:** It is mainly accrued salaries because we do not have exactly 26 weeks in a year.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So it is for the twenty-seventh pay?

**Ms Beamish Burton:** Not entirely the twenty-seventh pay, but to make it 30 days in a June month, because the last pay period might not be on 30 June.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Yes.

[3.15 pm]

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I go to page 702, "Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators", and in particular that one that was subject to the Ombudsman's report; that is, the proportion of children in care with comprehensive care planning that is undertaken within the statutory time lines. Can you advise what mechanisms are in place to report back to the Ombudsman on the implementation of the 23 recommendations that he made? Has that already occurred; and, if it has, is there an implementation report, and if there is will you table that? I might get the answer to that and I will ask the next question about that.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will ask the director to answer that question.

**Mr Murphy:** The first thing to recognise is that the Ombudsman's assessment was based on a sample of case files going back some time now, even eight or nine months before the report was



produced. So by the time the report was produced and, frankly, given the impetus provided by the Ombudsman doing the review and our own efforts over literally the previous years getting our care planning compliance up on most care planning—that is, the provisional care plan being required in seven days, a first care plan within 30 days and review done by 12 months—we are in most districts up to 95 per cent compliant, which is our target. There will always be five per cent slippage because although some districts very proudly announce when they are at 100 per cent, we allow for five per cent slippage just because people move around and we cannot control all the variables. So we monitor that on a monthly basis ourselves, that level of compliance by district, and are determined to keep it up around 95 per cent. We have a couple of districts who, for various reasons—staff gaps, shifts that occur—have slipped back. One I am thinking of, Fremantle district, for example, slipped back just under 85 per cent, but proudly announced last week they were just under 95 per cent. So we do have a bit of movement but by and large we are up around 95 per cent. The Ombudsman checks those figures with us periodically. Other than that, though, there is not a formal process for revisiting the issue because, as I say, it is built into our regular reporting.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** If I may, the budget target, you said, is 85 per cent but are you saying you have a separate internal target that is 95 per cent?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** What is your current compliance in respect of education and health care plans and how do you track those?

**Mr Murphy:** Not as well!

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** But it is good that we now have education and health care plans.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Indeed, it was a very good recommendation of the Ford report.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** We certainly needed them.

**Mr Murphy:** We do not measure the specific elements of care plans or dimensions, as they are called, separately. The Ombudsman did do that and that was, once again, very welcome and a really good impetus for the continued rollout and expansion of health and education plans. Health and education plans are something that we do not control ourselves entirely; it requires the cooperation of all the school sectors and the various health providers, but particularly the school nurses. We are confident that that dimension of care planning is increasing regularly and we are working with both education and health to get specific measurement. Once again, though, that is a cooperative measure and we are anticipating that this time next year we will be able to report that.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I refer to page 701. The eighth dot point refers to transition out of care to independence. I am happy to acknowledge the initiatives in respect of paying TAFE fees and for drivers' licences for children in care. My particular question is: is there any additional funding in this budget provided for transition out of care and is any of that funding being directed to supporting NGOs assisting care leavers that they have?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** If I can just talk about leaving care, certainly we do recognise the importance of addressing the needs of young people leaving care and transitioning to independent living. We work closely with a number of government agencies, as you know. In March 2011 we began to work on phase 2 of the leaving-care project which aimed to reform policy and practice guidance for supporting care leavers and implemented recommendations made through phase 1 of the project. In September 2011 we did publish the new leaving-care policy and practice guidance and, under the auspices of the rapid response initiative, as you have just mentioned, the waiver of the TAFE fees. I thought that you might be interested to know that we have approximately 480 children in the CEO's care aged 15 and above. So the leaving care is something that I am certainly taking a lot of notice of, because children who leave care and are not supported do not have particularly good outcomes; and in this state we are trying to at least give them good outcomes for when they do leave care until they are 25 years across the state. So, it is 15 to 25 years. But the

director said essentially that the answer to the question you asked before was no, although we do fund before —

**Mr Murphy:** There is a lot of funding but no extra.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, there is funding but no extra this year.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** My question was: is there any additional funding in this budget? I think the answer to that is no. The second part of my question was: is there any funding that is directed to NGOs?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The \$960 550 is for the three leaving-care services that we have, plus \$380 000 is funded to 2012.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes. I am not talking about Create; I am talking about where the placements are with an NGO. The issue that has been raised with me is that work is being done on leaving care, but no additional funding is being directed to NGOs to assist them manage the leaving care of the children whose placement they are responsible for.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Is that the \$960 550?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I am assuming that goes to the NGOs, so that money is there for those NGOs to use for young people leaving care.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Is that for everything, or is that just for leaving care? That is for everything, is it not?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Mission Australia is \$173 356; the Salvation Army is \$613 838; and Wanslea is \$173 356. I presume that leaving care is part of what they are set up to do.

**Mr Murphy:** They are specific for leaving-care services.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** That is just specific for leaving-care services.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Okay, thank you, and that is old money. That is new money, is that correct?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is the same money, yes.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am not sure if this was answered in answer to a question asked by Hon Alison Xamon, as it just was not clear to me. In respect of page 699, the hardship utility grants scheme, did you actually give us a figure for the estimated actual for 2011–12?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I think I said \$11.7 million.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Yes.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Do you track how many applications are made for HUGS more than once in a year, for example? Do you track families that come back?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, I have noticed we do.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Are you able to provide us with maybe a snapshot? I am not sure how you record it, but do you record it so that in the month of March, say, you could tell me that of 2 000 applications, 100 of those were the second time, 200 were the third time? How do you record it?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I know that, if it is not you who have asked many questions on HUGS, the opposition has asked many, many questions on HUGS and I am sure I have provided you with the numbers of people who apply —

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes, but not of more than once.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Not the second time?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** No.

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**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** My apologies then, but we can do that.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Do you need to take that on notice, as we have described that?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Within a certain time period, are you going to ask?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I do not know how you record it. If you record it monthly, then perhaps you can give me the most recent month that you have got, which might be April or June, whatever is the most convenient.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Okay, I am happy to do that.

*[Supplementary Information No A2.]*

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Minister, earlier you were answering Hon Alison Xamon; could you reiterate what you said was the total amount that you fund HUGS with?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I think I said that there were 24 —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** It was not written into the budget in the forward estimates. How much was allocated in the budget over the forward estimates; was it \$4.6 million?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is \$11.7 million.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** For this year?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I am pretty sure that I have said \$11.7 million. I did mention a figure of \$4.6 million—\$4.06 million is the recurrent.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** The recurrent is \$4.6 million.

**Ms Beamish Burton:** It is \$4.06 million

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Right, \$4.06 million.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** And this year you spent \$11.7 million?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No, I have not said I spent; I said it was budgeted. I said I spent nine point—I will hand it over to Peter, but I did give a rundown.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is why I wanted to go back and double-check it.

**Mr Byrne:** This year there was \$10.12 million spent, and then the amount for 2012–13 is \$11.7 million.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Right, and that was made up of \$2.39 million for financial counselling, or was it \$2.139 million?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is \$2.139 million for financial counselling.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Right, \$2.01 million for administration?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is \$0.201 million and \$9.360 million for HUGS grants.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So that \$4.06 million, that goes out over the forward estimates?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Ongoing funding, but I will hand over to Peter.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So how much of that is allocated to grants, how much is allocated to financial counselling and how much of that \$4.6 million is allocated to administration?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** There are 52 financial counselling services.

**Mr Byrne:** For 2013–14 it is \$3.248 million in grants; \$135 000 for admin and \$677 000 for the financial counselling.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Right, so a reduction of about \$1.7 million for financial counselling.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** As well as no provision for ongoing HUGS grants. So a reduction of \$1.7 million for counselling and a reduction of \$6 million in actual payments for people. So, what modelling did you do to determine that there would actually be less people requiring HUGS in the future than this year, or financial counselling?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Firstly, we are arguing the toss with Treasury.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** This is your budget, though, minister.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, that is right, and you keep arguing and you keep arguing until you get what you think that you deserve, that you need. Clearly you have pointed out that we do have a deficit there and I am arguing very strenuously that that deficit be lifted. But overall it is still a \$1.580 million increase.

[3.30 pm]

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** What is?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will hand over to the director.

**Mr Murphy:** As Peter Byrne just indicated, the estimated actual spend on HUGS in 2011–12 will be \$10.12 million. The budget estimate for next year is \$11.7 million, so that is an increase of \$1.58 million.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am interested in the forward estimates.

**Mr Murphy:** There is never a forward estimate for HUGS. There is only a continuation of the \$4 million approximately in recurrent funding. Every year there is a new estimate of HUGS demand. As has been explained in this committee over previous years, that is because the economic conditions, particularly, change on a year to year basis.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** You could argue that about anything you do, given the circumstances of the number of children who will be in care. Any activity you undertake as an organisation has the potential to change in future years because of outside parameters. Surely your forward estimates should be based on the best possible expectation of what is going to happen in those years, which would mean that for some reason you have an expectation that the demands for HUGS will fall over the period of the forward estimates. I am trying to find out what modelling you use to determine that. The Premier is right; the forward estimates become a waste of time because they are not an accurate reflection of the finances of the state, in which case the debt figures are going to be a lot higher than we would otherwise expect.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The government does not shirk its responsibility where HUGS is concerned. That is why people can get it twice if they need to. It is \$790 up north and \$480 or \$490 down south. If people are in real hardship, they can get it again. The government has also put out a cost of living assistance package where people on low incomes can get \$200 off their electricity bill in the year. If they have children—say, they have two children and they are on a low income, they can get an extra \$307. If they have more children, they can get more subsidy. That comes off their electricity bill in the year. We have not shirked away from our responsibility. We have put \$11.7 million into the budget. There are direct entry points to the utility where people can now pick up the phone and get directly through to the utility and have that payment accepted by the utility, whether it is Alinta or whatever utility they use. We are being a very responsible government and the money is there to be used.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Still on the question of HUGS, the minister is right; the opposition has asked a series of questions about HUGS. In one month earlier this year, of the nearly 1 800 approved grants, nearly two-thirds of those were to people who had dependent children. What tracking do you

do on how that translates into what other stresses might be going on in that household? Do you see a correlation between financial stress and a relationship between child protection in any other area that child protection has responsibility for?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** When people are under financial stress, it certainly does have an effect on their household budget and whether they have enough money coming into the house to look after their children properly. As I said, that is why we have HUGS in the first place, so that people do not have to go without, so that they can use the HUGS system and they can use it again if they are in hardship or in another crisis situation. Certainly we don't shy away from that. As to your question, I will ask the director.

**Mr Murphy:** Tracking is done through HUGS, as the answers to the parliamentary questions indicate. We know how many dependent children are in the families asking for HUGS grants. Applicants for HUGS grants can be referred to financial counselling. We have undertaken training with the utilities as we have withdrawn the compulsory referral to financial counselling to help them discern when it is appropriate to make that referral. That is the first possible point of the intervention with a family who we otherwise do not know. In turn, financial counsellors have some ability, they are not trained social workers and neither should they be, to refer to the department or non-government services, including the services of which they are a part. Anglicare, for example, is a large provider of both financial counselling and other social welfare services and they are integrated. Really, it is a matter of when a person comes to the attention of, first, the utility, second, the financial councillors, and, third, welfare agencies, that they can receive the assistance they need.

The minister indicated—I responded in the same way to the homelessness question—that financial stress is a stress and for families who are vulnerable and have difficulty providing safe care for their children, it is never just one factor. Often financial stress and homelessness are downstream factors from more fundamental issues such as violence in relationships, drug and alcohol abuse and mental health issues. All of these underlying problems in vulnerable families who cannot provide safety for their children do tend to interact. It is the skill of child protection workers to dissect and separate those issues and tackle what can be tackled to make sure children are safe.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Minister, last week in Wanneroo I heard you praising the communities for their acceptance of the group homes for the children up there. I think that was right, was it not? I did not misunderstand you.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** You are the one who is talking.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am just asking you. Is that a correct interpretation?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, I did. I thanked all communities for their support because I am the one who goes out and has barbecues with them and introduces them to the children.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Minister, are you able to tell us how much you have spent on those homes in Timely Hostess Mews and Kentia Loop, I think is the other one?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The money to purchase the houses?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** No, how much have you spent on running and managing those homes over the last financial year and what is your budget for the future?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Are you against us putting children in homes in rural areas?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** You know that is not the case. That is a silly question.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I just asked. He asked me so I just asked him.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** You just make yourself look silly.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** My position has not changed on my previous positions uttered in the house when you were there.

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**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Thank you. I know that you have been very supportive of these homes in the past. I was asking: are you not supportive? I was just wondering where you were leading.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am supportive, minister. That is why I wrote to you and asked for a briefing on it, and asked to be able to visit the homes, to which you took months to respond and then you did not address that particular question, if I might add.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I am very pleased that you brought that up. Firstly, let me apologise. I do not know why that letter took so long to answer.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** And you did not answer any of the questions I asked.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I did know why it took so long. Firstly, let me apologise for the time it took for me to answer that. I did think that you would come back with a question either at the budget or in Parliament, which you are doing now.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am interested to know whether we have the answer to those questions.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I do not particularly want to say where the houses are but one of them in Wanneroo is \$109 465 and the other one is \$78 690. That is what we have spent to the end of March.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** On capital or operating?

**Mr Byrne:** That is for the fit-out, not the purchase price.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** That is the fit-out. Do you want the purchase price?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** No, I am not interested in the purchase price.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Operational costs.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** And any repairs or maintenance.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I do not have that. We can take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Can we try to have one at a time? It is really hard for Hansard. If someone else is speaking, just hang on.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will clarify that. Those two figures were for the actual fit-out cost. I knew that you did not want the house price because you have already had that. They were the fit-out costs. Now you want the running costs, which we can provide. It is approximately \$1 million each per year but we can provide the exact figures.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am particularly interested in maintenance and repairs and dealing with any problems that have occurred at the house in terms of fixing those problems, if you can give me those.

*[Supplementary Information No A3.]*

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Is that section of the agency adequately funded to be able to provide timely correspondence to concerns raised by members of the community?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, we do give timely responses to people who come to me. I apologise for the one that took so long to get back to you. There were factors outside of my control. Certainly members of the public are seen by departmental staff and we have a very good rapport with them.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Minister, not responding to me is one thing but not responding to the local community is another. Do you consider it appropriate that the local community has not received a response to a letter that they sent to the government on 3 April raising a range of concerns about issues that have occurred at that house and that they still have not had a written response to that letter? If they are adequately resourced, why would it take so long for them not to have a response?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I cannot answer that but I did get a response, I believe, about that time. I did hear that people were not particularly happy out there. I am not sure whether it was by letter or by phone call. I believe I sent one of the departmental staff out there to talk to them. I did send a departmental staff member out to talk to them personally. I apologise if I did not follow up with the letter. I assume because the departmental staff had gone and spoken to them that that was the end of the matter. It is unusual for me not to send a follow-up letter. I will check that out.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Can you also provide us with the dates and times on which you asked for the departmental officers to go out and talk to them and when that occurred because the community has sent follow-up letters to the government asking why their letter has not been responded to and they still have not had a response? Minister, I support these homes but it is very difficult to try to convince the public that they should continue to support the homes when they do not get timely responses to legitimate issues that they raise.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I am not sure that that is correct because I am very, very red hot on sending letters back. I thought that the department had dealt with it but it is very unusual for me not to send a follow-up letter or to ignore constituents, even if they are your constituents.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** All our constituents.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I do not do that. I want it noted very clearly that if there has been some mix up, I will certainly sort it out. I will personally go out and see them myself if there are further problems. I do not mind doing that.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** The issue from those people's point of view, because they send me the same correspondence they send Hon Ken Travers, is that it is not just one letter that has not been responded to; it is several.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** In my office?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** That is what they are saying.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** And to the Premier, which I assume would then get drafted by your office.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I would be absolutely horrified if a letter that came to my office was not responded to. If that is the case, I will personally go out and apologise to these people because four weeks ago I sent a departmental staff member out there to speak to them. I will give you the time or date that he would have gone out there to do that.

[3.45 pm]

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** And when you asked for that to occur.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will ask the director to comment because I think he was there.

[*Supplementary Information No A4.*]

**Mr Murphy:** There is a series of meetings being held with the residents, particularly around Mariginiup. I was out there, together with the executive director of accommodation and care, the manager of the house, the director of residential care and the various neighbours. We will check the right date, but on or about the time you are referring to in early April. So I think, as the minister indicated, there is a mix-up with letters. We, both the department and—as the minister has indicated—her office, are very careful of this, and if we have mucked up, we will remedy it.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Minister, when I wrote to you, I also attached a whole range of questions. One of the reasons I did that was because I did not necessarily want that information on the public record, and you have asked me now to do it on the public record. I will put them on notice, but I also want to make it clear that I am not asking for the individual names of clients that have stayed at those homes; what I am looking for is how many children have been housed at those properties and what the turnover is, without identifying any of the residences. So I am happy to put the more

detailed questions on notice, but is there any reason why you will not be able to answer those questions? You are aware of the questions that I was interested in.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No, there probably will not be any reason why we cannot answer them. I am very, very protective, as I know that you are —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Which is why I wrote to you and offered to let you give it to me privately and not on the public record.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, but even if I had given you a letter, it would still go on the public record, so I just assumed that you would ask me questions anyway. I was rather embarrassed that it had taken so long to get back to you; that is not what usually happens. There were two or three letters that we found through the system that had not been answered. As I said, I am very embarrassed about that. But we are very protective of the children, the young people, and I will answer to you in a way that will not identify or—and if there is a question there that I cannot, I will speak to you about it.

**The CHAIR:** Is that supplementary information A5, or do you want it privately?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I will put them as questions on notice.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I refer to page 710. Under “Net Appropriation Determination”, I am asking about the point “Unattached Refugee Children”. I was wanting to get a bit of a breakdown on how this funding is spent. Also, how many unattached refugee children are in WA at the moment? Also, as part of the numbers of unattached children, what it is estimated is likely to be—whether you have actually got some estimated numbers you are working from in the out years.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will go through it bit by bit. The department accepts delegated guardianship for some unaccompanied human minors referred to as UHMs. I have said before in this place, I really dislike the term “UHM” —

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** It is horrible.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** — or “unaccompanied human minor”.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Is that human minor?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will say very clearly and very loudly, this is not my terminology and I dislike it greatly.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** As do I.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** That is appalling!

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** It is appalling.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Minister, that is appalling, is it not?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is appalling and it is what the federal government terms these children. Referred by the commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship, DIAC, under the Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Act 1946, the department accepts this delegation where a carer has been identified for the—I will call them young person—young person or where there are child protection considerations. The department has been bearing the majority of the costs of caring for these young people but intends to negotiate a new cost-sharing model with DIAC, which currently contributes only \$1 300 per child per annum. Currently, each child costs the department an average of approximately \$30 000 per year, depending on their age and care needs. These children referred to the department arrive in Australia through the humanitarian program or through Christmas Island as asylum seekers and are granted permanent residence visas by DIAC. DIAC then requests the department to accept delegated guardianship and where this occurs, these young people become children in the CEO’s care under the meaning of the Children and Community Services Act. Other UHMs—other children—reside in Western Australia cared for by Life Without



Barriers under the direct guardianship of the commonwealth Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. There are currently 20 young people in the care of the CEO. Of this number, six are from Burma, six are from Afghanistan, five are from Liberia, two are from the Sudan and one is from the Congo. Six are 17 years, four are 16 years, two are 15 years, one is 14 years and two are 13 years. We have some younger children; one is 11, two are nine and two eight-year-olds. The department is currently assessing care arrangements for a further 12 UHM children; seven from the Congo, three from Vietnam, one from Afghanistan and one from Somalia. The department is reviewing its response to these requests and has developed a revised cost-sharing model. Acceptance of that guardianship will be conditional on DIAC agreeing to a 50 per cent cost-sharing model. The Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council, which I sit on—no, there is a subcommittee. I sit on the council. The subcommittee on these children has terms of reference which include developing a national model and uniform funding arrangements.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Sorry, is it possible for me to get a breakdown? You said it is \$13 000 per child —

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is \$30 000—approximately \$30 000.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I am sorry, minister—is it 30 or 13?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is \$30 000 a year, depending on their age and care needs, so it is an average cost.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Right, so a \$30 000 actual cost and of that \$1 300 is supplied by the commonwealth.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, it is supplied by the federal —

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Is it possible to get—I am happy to take it on notice, Madam Chair, if it is easier—a breakdown of how that \$30 000 per child is usually allocated?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, I am happy to do that.

*[Supplementary Information No A5.]*

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** So we get \$30 000?

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** It costs \$30 000 per child per annum and \$1 300 of that is supplied by the commonwealth.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** So the rest of that is funded by the state?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** \$13 000 is.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No, \$1 300 per child. It is only \$1 300. What we are trying to do is a 50 per cent cost share.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Okay, so you are asking for a 50 per cent cost share. The 50 per cent cost share, it is only if that is agreed that is the basis on which you will take more children under that program.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is pretty hard when we are paying out all this money when we have our own children in care to care for.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** These are now Australian children.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** These are our children too, but what I am saying is the commonwealth needs to meet their responsibility. We certainly accept these children, but we see that it is very unfair that we are paying out \$30 000 and the commonwealth is paying \$1 300 when

it comes through the department of immigration. So there does need to be some basis of equality here and I cannot see any as yet.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Minister, do you have any figures for the other states as to how many unaccompanied minors in other states are currently being looked after? Because it would seem to me that the majority do seem to come to Western Australia. I am just wondering if we are being roughly done by, as usual, by our friends from the commonwealth.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I believe we have a smaller proportion of children. I am not sure whether I can get the other states. I could certainly write to them, but whether —

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** No, I just thought you might have had it.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** I suppose this is a little bit tongue in cheek, but can you just answer for me: this “human minors” terminology that is used by the federal government, are there non-human minors coming here as refugees?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Myna birds—maybe that is what they mean.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** I think that is just an appalling turn of phrase.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I have always said it is an appalling term. Hon Sue Ellery agrees with me, Hon Alison Xamon agrees with me; most people agree with me.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Nobody here I think would —

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We are not going to fix it here in a budget hearing.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I refer to page 705, the asset investment program and the second paragraph. I was wondering if I could get some information on when the Midland and Armadale offices will be moving. It says 2012–13, but I was wondering if the minister could give some more detail on that and where the new offices are going to be located.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will ask Peter to answer.

**Mr Byrne:** The Midland one, we are currently negotiating a lease and therefore we are expecting to be in towards the end of the 2012–13 financial year.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** But it will be in Midland again, yes?

**Mr Byrne:** Yes, it certainly will be in Midland. The Armadale one, we are actually negotiating with the council, but there are no decisions made in relation to that one at this stage. We do not have anywhere at this stage.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** All right, so do you have any time frames, because you need to? The Midland one, as has been raised for several years, is quite urgent because the current situation is in no way good enough. But with the Armadale one, are you feeling hopeful that that is going to get resolved within the time frame that you have stipulated? The reason I ask that is I also am aware that there is a chronic lack of appropriate facilities out at Armadale, unlike Midland, which is actually expanding the buildings that are available out there quite considerably.

**Mr Byrne:** There is nothing at this stage. We are talking to the council and hoping the council will be able to assist us. But as soon as we can find something, we will be moving as quickly as we can on Armadale.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Again this is on the asset investment program, and the third paragraph about the reform of residential care services. How many places have yet to be constructed or expanded? Also, why is there the delay? When is it expected that these are going to be completed?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will hand it over to the director to answer that while I am having a look!

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**Mr Murphy:** As I indicated earlier, the expansion of residential care is almost complete but in the country towns mentioned in the last paragraph there—Kununurra, Wyndham, Newman, Kalgoorlie and South Hedland—each of those places we have either an old building which we are using or have adapted, or we have rented a building for temporary accommodation, pending building. The delay in building, really, it is not too flip to say that building always takes longer than you planned and hoped for. Issues tend to be thrown up. In Port Hedland, for example, we are engaged in negotiating a land swap with Pilbara Cities because our land is right in the middle of a major residential development and it does not make sense for us to necessarily be there as much as it makes sense to optimise the value of the land through residential development. However, that takes time. We will not be disadvantaged in any way, but it takes time. Kalgoorlie, we have also had negotiation issues there, affected by native title, which have been slower to resolve, so it is a range of factors. The other I would throw in, though, is that, particularly in the country, we perhaps underestimated costs or over-specified for the buildings we wanted, putting in maybe a bit more space and a bit more complementary accommodation than in the final analysis are essential. We have had to have two bites on the specifications and that slowed us down a bit.

[4.00 pm]

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Are you able to give me—I am happy to take it on notice if you do not have it here—exactly how many places will be available in Kununurra, Wyndham, Newman, Kalgoorlie and South Hedland?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes; Kalgoorlie hostel, Kununurra hostel and Port Hedland hostel are called hostels because they will have six beds; whereas Newman group home and Wyndham group home are called group homes because they will have four beds. We want a bit of flexibility around those numbers but they are the numbers we are aiming for.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** All the children who are anticipated to go into these places are currently staying within the same townships. I am picking that up from what you said; it is not quite satisfactory accommodation but they are in the same township as they will ultimately be located.

**Mr Murphy:** It is always fluid with children in care, as kids come in and move to family particularly. But yes, they are all children from that region. By and large, we do not have the problem, for example, they have in the Northern Territory of removing children, particularly Aboriginal children, from their country and bringing them to large towns and cities. We do pretty well keeping kids in their regional centres. The only exceptions to that are when their behaviour has become so extreme that they need the very specialised services that are available only in the city. Even then, we have had some really marked successes, for example, through secure care, stabilising young people and returning them to remote Aboriginal communities with wraparound family support.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** The forth dot point on page 706 refers to the “conclusion of the Commonwealth funded East Kimberley Family and Domestic Violence Hub project in 2011–12.” I am wondering whether there is any intention to continue the program with state or other funding, and was it deemed to be a success?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, I think it was deemed to be a success. But all these federally funded programs have a finite ending. They were from 2007 to 2012 and \$6.8 million was provided. We put in an application for state government royalties for regions to continue funding but that was unsuccessful. A variation to the MOU with FaHCSIA to extend the project activity end date to 31 December 2012 was requested and granted. That will allow the project manager to prepare and submit the project acquittals. Grant funding for the non-government service providers to work with the communities will cease on 30 June. A final funding allocation for the establishment of the Kalumburu safe house women’s centre project has been made by FaHCSIA. Tenders for this project close on 15 May 2012, with funds needed to be expended by 2012. Support is being provided to funded non-government organisations to explore alternative funding options available to enable

continuation of at least some service delivery. The department is also negotiating with the Department of the Attorney General and FaHCSIA to explore possible funding options to continue some components of that hub.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I refer to “Service Summary” on page 700 where the first item under “Expense” is “Supporting Children and Young People in the Chief Executive Officer’s Care” and the 2012–13 budget of \$259-odd million. When you talk about caseworkers—I think you said there were something like 689—is that for the same period of 2012-13? Are they really all supporting children and young people or is it in the second part as well or maybe in the third part?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** As at 31 May we had 781 case workers.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** That is good enough, thank you. That is probably about \$340 million if they are all applied in supporting children and young people. I may not be correct in that being the allocation. Does it go across any of the three categories of the service summary?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Only services 1 and 2 for caseworkers, and 775 others.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** That is \$487 million. There is a whole lot of other funding there, I presume, for other not-for-profit agencies.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** We fund a lot of not-for-profit agencies. You heard me talk about the 37 refuges we fund with \$28 million. The director can tell you about services 1, 2 and 3.

**Mr Murphy:** Service 1, “Supporting Children and Young People in the Chief Executive Officer’s Care” includes other items such as adoption services, a position called the advocate for the children in care; some proportion of our central Aboriginal area to support the Aboriginal child placement principle as well as staff case support costs, which average \$4 800 approximately per child; and non-government organisation CREATE Foundation. All residential care is in that area and that is very high operating costs in addition to staff. It includes a proportion of district office costs but that is largely around case management and the direct support activities for children and young people. We have a dedicated unit as well that we call the duty of care unit that investigates allegations of harm to children who are already in care, no matter how that has occurred, whether through accident or misadventure. Foster care subsidies are a very large proportion of that funding. There is fostering services, which are responsible for the recruitment and training of foster carers; the leaving-care services, the minister described earlier, costing around \$1 million; and all the placement services we provide are purchased from non-government agencies. You can see in that breakdown there are a number of items other than direct care staff who operate on the ratio as mentioned earlier of one to 15. Services 2 and 3 have similar breakdowns of the component.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Of the case workers—you probably do not have it with you, but as supplementary information—I wonder whether you would not mind giving us a job description of a case worker? I am particularly interested in the extent of the responsibility that a case worker has for each of the 15, 12 or 10 children they have under their care. I would like to know the distinction between their overall responsibility and how close they are to their children compared to other not-for-profit groups who are working with the same children. I get the sense that in some cases, a case worker may not be as on top of what is happening to the child as maybe they should be, ideally. I want to see what the job description is and probably go from there in responding to the agency.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** We can do that, but I refute the position that caseworkers do not know what is happening to the children they have in their caseloads. Being an ex-child protection worker myself, albeit a long time ago, we are very close to the children we work with because we are the intermediary. We have to know what the children are doing. We have care plans that we have to look at, that we have to fill out. We have to know where they go to school, we have to know who their parents are, we have to know their time lines, we have to know who they are close to. There are so many things that a social worker or a caseworker has to know about a child. That is why we stipulate that 15 caseloads to a case worker are more than enough. In the bad old days some

of them had 40 caseloads. When I started work—I will give you an example—I had the whole caseload, so I was there over Christmas for two weeks and had the whole lot in an office that would have amounted to probably about 400 cases in that office. They were all mine; that was in the bad old days. Now we have team leaders, peer support, mentors and training, which is very important for social workers and we have trained social workers in many cases. In some cases we do not; we have child protection workers but, mostly, they are highly trained in their field. But we can provide you with that information.

[*Supplementary Information No A6.*]

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** There is no doubt it is a complex area. You have my empathy on it, but there are also the myth and reality issues sometimes. I want to try to get to what the reality is. With the 12 to 15 children with each caseworker—they work with the pathways. Do you have an outcome analysis of roughly where over a period of time the 700-odd caseworkers—let us say, 12, which is 8 500 children—they end up each year, what they achieve and what the success rate is based on the plan you are implementing?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Success rates are not quantifiable really, because you are working with children; you are working with human beings —

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I understand the difficulty.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** — you are working with difficult situations in many cases. Children who come into care are there because they have been either sexually abused, physically abused or emotionally abused and sometimes the whole three. You are working with very dysfunctional families.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I am prepared to accept your definition. All I want to know is whether there is an outcome analysis of some kind. It can be being settled; it does not need to be achieving high school or anything like that; it is a matter of what you think is a benchmark you are using. You must be using some kind of benchmark because the director general said he has had some outstanding successes. Whatever the director general meant by those words I am happy to accept but I want to know roughly what they are and how they are working?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Well, we are human beings and we are complex. I will put to you what I think is success. I go to a function every year where we give scholarships to our children in care and we give them scholarships to go to university to go on to further studies. There were, I think, 17 young people and they were just gorgeous. They had been through the care system and we were giving them funding to go on to university. Some wanted to be doctors; some wanted to be lawyers. Their case workers were there; their foster parents were there. To me, that is a measure of success. Or there is maybe the little boy who has come in so severely abused that no-one can get close to him and one day he runs up and cuddles his foster mum for the first time after 12 months. That is success because the case worker has been working with the foster parents in the best interests of that child.

[4.15 pm]

I do not think you can quantify. You cannot say that you have to meet this target or that target or some other target because we are all individuals and they have all been hurt individuals, so to me the success of it is transitioning them out of care successfully. I guess to me that is what success is, but if you are saying along the way that we have yardsticks where we measure, I think it is up to every individual caseworker that they would have yardsticks that they measure as being very important to that child and those foster parents.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** You just gave us a bit of a benchmark; you said transitioning out of care successfully. Whatever you meant by that, let us try that as a first start, because that is what I would be interested in—to know that as a first start.

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**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Some do, some do not.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** No, I understand. That is what I mean. You have actually used the word “success” yourself, so I just want you to bring that to us as supplementary information, please.

**The CHAIR:** So my understanding is that that is the success criteria?

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** And how many achieve the kind of success to which the minister and the director general have referred, in their words in the transcript, so far.

[*Supplementary Information No A7.*]

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** If I might, Madam Chair. I would have thought the answer to a lot of those questions would have been on page 702, under “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators”, because we are talking about complexity. I did actually have a question pertaining to that, which was basically: why, under “Outcome: Children and young people needing protection are safe from abuse and harm”, the budgeted target is actually lower than the estimated actual for this past year? It seems to me that if you are actually on a trend of getting a better outcome, I would hope that you would want to continue with that, so I had a question about that. I suppose, related to the issue of how you measure success, I am interested as to whether you actually consider percentages of successful reunifications as a measure of success, for example. I know that I would regard that as a success.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will answer your last question first, and then hand over to the director. Reunification is what we try to do, and we have put it up from \$2 million in 2007 to \$7-odd million, so we are working with families. Of course we want children to go back home, but if they cannot, there are other steps that we need to take, but certainly reunification, if it is done and done properly and done well, is wonderful for all concerned. But in some cases that cannot be done because we have sexual abuse, for a start. The children who are badly damaged because of their parents clearly cannot go home, and that is when we go into guardianship and foster care and we look at other alternatives for those children. If it is a mum and children and they need to be reunified, we do that, and we do it quite successfully with the NGOs.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** My original question, though, was actually about the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators, and why your budget target for children and young people needing protection to be safe from abuse and harm is lower than even your estimated actual for this year.

**Mr Murphy:** The main rationale there is that that is more consistent with international benchmarks. The US standard figure for those indicators, they measure it in the obverse and it is 5.7 per cent, so that would have our indicator at 94.3 per cent. We think that 95 per cent is a reasonable target —

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** It would certainly help to always strive to be better than the US!

**Mr Murphy:** Yes, it is a curate’s egg in the US; there are good bits and not so good bits. That is consistent with international measurement, though. To be frank, it is a bit like our care planning, where we are coming from a low base and we are aiming for 85 per cent, but internally we aim for 95 per cent. Really, our aspiration for that indicator is far more like 98 per cent. We are not there yet, but we are on a slow increase. I might just throw one more number at you, if I may, because it illustrates the varied ways that we measure our activity. We have talked a lot about reunification being a success, but only when it is safe to do so. Our growth in children in care over recent years has been between four per cent and six per cent, and this year we are much closer to six per cent. The growth in the number of assessments we have been doing in that time is around 90 per cent. Not last year but the year before it was 90 per cent. To have that many more vulnerable families being assessed regarding the safety of their children and holding the increase in children in care down to a much lower figure, we regard as a success, but it is still a high-growth number in the number of children coming into care, because we will not compromise safety where we have to do so. There is a whole range of ways of measuring safety. The sort of life outcomes that children in

care that Hon Philip Gardiner referred to tend to be measured in research reports rather than monitoring, simply because it is so difficult to do so. We will dig out some of those for you.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I can understand the difficulty in the different measures of where success is. Just one final question: do you have an alumnus or a club where they can get together—those who have been through the care process?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** We have something called the Create Foundation, and all children who have left care can belong to Create. I have had a lot to do with young people who have left care and they certainly do get together and help the other ones who are in care. I think that is the beauty of it; they can show them that they have been through the system and sometimes, for the older ones who have left care, just coming into care is very difficult and traumatic so I think they see themselves as role models for the other children. Certainly at Christmas parties and other occasions, the Create care leaders are there with the other children.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** The mentor role, I can see, it is important, but even just the peer group together I would have thought would be equally supportive. None of us is totally stable, and the people who come through your system have more difficulties to come through, so that kind of mutual support at that peer level would be very important.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I am pretty stable!

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** I have a couple questions on outcomes and key effectiveness indicators. I just want to pick up on a point that Hon Alison Xamon was talking about before. You talked about group care homes being four beds and when it gets to six beds it is called a hostel—is that right? On this “I don’t like terms” phrase, I do not like the term “hostel” either. “Hostile” is almost a similar word. Could you not call them “large group care homes” and “small group care homes”? I have been to one of the larger ones with the minister in Kalgoorlie and seen how fabulous it is, and it is a care home; it is not a hostel. Especially if we look at the inquiries that are going on at the moment, there is a connotation that goes with hostels from long ago that is not nice. I do not know if it is possible, but I just think it would be nicer to call it something else other than a hostel.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It does not even enter my head because I always say—Hon Ken Travers heard me say it the other night—that we do not have hostels anymore, and I mean those big hostels that used to be around when I was working, so I do not actually call them hostels; I thought we did not want it in our terminology.

**Mr Murphy:** Done!

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** On outcomes and key effectiveness indicators, the proportion of Indigenous children in the CEO’s care placed in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle, we have seen some figures where there are quite large gaps between what we are budgeting for, the actuals and the estimated actuals. I just want to confirm, if we go down to “Explanation of Significant Movements”, is that directly attributed to the fact that there are difficulties in the department being able to actually obtain the right sort of people to become engaged in that program? Is this another international benchmark figure that you are using? Are we pitching it too high in the first place? It seems there that the department is not doing very well in that area, but I do not think that is right. But it just seems, if you look at the cold, hard figures, that is what you would pick up from that.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will hand over to the director, but we are certainly very mindful and we do have about 46 per cent, I think, of Aboriginal children in our care, so I will hand over to the director.

**Mr Murphy:** The first thing to say is that you could argue that we are 100 per cent in compliance with the Aboriginal child placement principle, because there are four options under that principle, the fourth of which is placement with a non-Aboriginal carer. What we are actually measuring here is placement with an Aboriginal carer. This has annoyed me for many years: our numbers have

slipped, and that is a direct reflection, I believe, of the capacity in Aboriginal families to care for more children. There are certainly a lot of Aboriginal families who are getting stronger, but the ones who are strong tend to be looking after their family and they get overloaded. The craziest thing we could do is add another child into the family mix, with aunties and grannies and so on, and then have them fall over. This is more pronounced in regional and remote communities particularly. I think we have been stricter in not overloading families and also in not accepting only a marginally better level of safety in a placement family than the family from which the child was removed. As a result, there are more children being placed with non-Aboriginal carers. The reason the fourth option under that legislation is there is that if we do that, maintaining connection with Aboriginal family has to occur, and maintaining cultural identity, first through that connection with family but also through a range of other activities that children might participate in, is really essential. At the same time as we have a high proportion of children placed with a non-Aboriginal family, we have got better, over recent years, at maintaining those connections and cultural identity.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Just on cultural appropriateness as well, I think last year we spoke about the rise in the number of children from CALD backgrounds going into care, and we were concerned about that. Is that rise continuing, or are we seeing that stabilise?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I think I saw a figure of just over 100 children from CALD backgrounds; it is up there. If we take Mirrabooka, for instance, we have two wonderful African workers who work with the African people out in Mirrabooka. It is certainly rising, because it was unheard of a few years back, but now it is certainly in place. We do have children from different backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, in care. The director general has just told me that the department won an award for working with African people out in Mirrabooka recently, so that is very good.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** On page 699, “Major Spending Changes”, there is a line there, “Continuation of Emergency Management Services”, and it is down there as a major spending change, but I do not see anything that really relates to that as significant issues impacting the agency. Can you just explain to me why that is seen as a major spending change?

[4.30 pm]

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is just a continuation of emergency management services. Under the Emergency Management Act and Western Australian emergency management arrangements, the department is responsible for coordinating the provision of welfare support services to people affected by an emergency or disaster.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Is this natural disasters and emergencies?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, and to give the financial year stats 2011–12 to 31 May, we have had the Waroona storms, Collie storms, Maddington storms, Gosnells gas leak, Augusta–Margaret River bushfire, Milyeannup fires, southern wheatbelt storm, Cloverdale fires, wheatbelt tornado, Pilbara flooding and cyclone Heidi, Carnarvon bushfires, Malaga toxic fire, Burringurah flood, cyclone Iggy, Bindoon fires, south west fires, Northcliffe fires, Nannup fires, cyclone Lua and Kalumburu floods. It has been a year for absolute disasters, and we have people on standby who just swing into action at disasters and coordinate the welfare services. Can I just say that the Department for Child Protection does an absolutely amazing job and everybody gives them credit for this type of work.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Those ones that you read out, was that for the 2011–12 year?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, to 31 May.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** How much of an increase was that on the 2010–11 year?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** There were 26, from memory—I have quoted 26. I am not sure whether some of those were in this one or not.



**The CHAIR:** Would you like to have that taken on notice?

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** I would not mind having a comparison between those two years, because there is not a great increase in allocation of moneys to that area. The department is obviously working under pressure.

[*Supplementary Information No A8.*]

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I refer on page 699 to “Capital Appropriation”. Last year, the appropriation was \$11.8 million and the estimated actual was \$9.2 million, and there is doing in this year’s appropriation for capital. In the other place, in answer to questions about this matter, the director general indicated that the \$2.6 million, which is the difference, is what was not spent last year on the expansion of residential care in the north west. Is that \$2.6 million still available for expenditure on expansion in the north west, and what is the time line for that expenditure?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, it is still available for expansion. I will ask Peter to explain.

**Mr Byrne:** The homes in Kununurra, Wyndham, I believe, and Newman have gone out and the tenders have closed, so we will be commencing construction on those three immediately and we hope to get Kalgoorlie out as soon as possible.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Just so that I am absolutely clear, is it being spent on what it was originally going to be spent on?

**Mr Byrne:** That is correct.

**The CHAIR:** We need to close this hearing. The committee will forward any additional questions it has to you, minister, in writing in the next couple of days, together with the transcript of evidence, which will include the questions that have been taken on notice. Members, if you have any unasked questions, please submit them to the committee clerk by email at the close of the hearing. Responses to these questions will be requested within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. Should you be unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date, and please advise any specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. Finally, on behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your attendance at the hearing this afternoon.

**Hearing concluded at 4.34 pm**

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