

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

**2010–11 ONGOING BUDGET ESTIMATES
(IN RELATION TO A MATTER ARISING FROM HEARING HELD ON 16
JULY 2010)**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
MONDAY, 14 FEBRUARY 2011**

Members

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

Hearing commenced at 3.08 pm**BROWN, MRS REBECCA****Executive Director, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, sworn and examined:**

[Witness took the oath.]

The CHAIR: You will have signed a document entitled “Information for Witnesses”.

Mrs Brown: Yes.

The CHAIR: Have you read and understood this document?

Mrs Brown: Yes.

The CHAIR: The proceedings this afternoon are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document that you might refer to during the course of the hearing. Make sure there is a microphone pointing at you. I think you are pretty right there. If, for some reason, you wish to make a confidential statement during today’s proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that the uncorrected transcript should not be published or disclosed. This prohibition does not, however, prevent you from discussing your public evidence generally once you leave the hearing. Government agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting Parliament to scrutinise budget papers on behalf of the people of Western Australia. We value your assistance.

Members, do we have questions? I note, before we move to Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich, that we are in receipt of a document which was requested by the committee. It is signed by the director general dated 7 February. That is a public document, so members can refer to that during the course of the hearing.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Mrs Brown, I notice that the committee is made up of six members including Mr Tim Marney, Professor Peter Shergold, Mr John Langoulant, Ms Catherine Nance, Mr Peter Conran and Mr Mal Wauchope. I am wondering whether you could advise whether any members of that committee are in fact paid?

Mrs Brown: The committee ceased operations when it provided its final report to government, which was released in December 2009. None of the members are currently being paid at this stage. I would note that Professor Peter Shergold has been appointed independent chair of the Partnership Forum, which was established by government last year; however that is on a no-fee basis.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Prior to the committee being disbanded, were any of the following paid to sit on that committee: Professor Peter Shergold, Mr John Langoulant and Ms Catherine Nance?

Mrs Brown: I cannot technically answer that question. You would need to ask either the Treasurer’s office, the Treasurer, or the Department of Treasury and Finance in providing support to that committee. It is my understanding that two of those members, or three of those members, may have been paid, but you would need to check that with them. I will have to take that on notice; I do not know. I cannot answer that factually.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Could you take that on notice?

Mrs Brown: Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No A1.*]

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Likewise, the administrative support for that committee, I assume that that was provided through the Department of Treasury and Finance once again?

Mrs Brown: The Department of Treasury and Finance, correct.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Have you got any information in relation to the cost of providing that support?

Mrs Brown: Again, you would need to seek that from either—we can take that as a supplementary question.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Can you take that also as a question on notice?

The CHAIR: Would that logically be part of A1 as well—does that make sense?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Yes.

Mrs Brown: So, any costs associated with the committee and its secretariat?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Yes.

I wonder whether you could take us through how the committee currently operates.

Mrs Brown: The committee no longer —

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Not the committee, but the unit you are involved with. How does that operate? How many staff does it have? What does it do?

Mrs Brown: I just make a general comment, which is as outlined in the briefing note. It gives an outline of government's approach to the report more generally in its directions. I work as an executive director in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in the strategic issues unit. I have a range of functions including oversight of progressing government directions with regards to the Economic Audit Committee report, in particular those directions around working collaboratively across the public sector and with the community sector.

[3.14 pm]

In terms of the number of FTEs in my unit, that is not solely dedicated to this area of work. I have approximately a team of four; however, that is spread across a number of functions.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: If you were to calculate how many of those FTEs are actually for the purpose of working on the Economic Audit Committee recommendations, how many would that be of those four?

Mrs Brown: Probably in terms of supporting the Partnership Forum, establishing the social innovation grants program and progressing the community development investment fund, approximately three FTEs. We work jointly with the community sector and have a number of arrangements with them also, including previously two secondments but currently one secondment from WACOSS one day per week. We again work jointly with a number of other agencies, including the central agencies of Treasury and Finance and the Public Sector Commission, but also, more importantly, with line agencies in progressing some of these directions.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: When do you envisage we will actually see savings in government expenditure as a result of the work of the Economic Audit Committee?

Mrs Brown: To put some context around this, the Economic Audit Committee report provided a series of directions across the public sector and the way in which it works, and the way in which it partners with others, including the community sector and the community more generally. In government's response, government has said that it will work through the directions, take them into account in some of its broader work going forward. It has not been articulated the extent of any savings envisaged from the report nor did the committee, from my understanding, articulate, certainly in this report, any savings expected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Certainly in terms of the government's election policy, the Economic Audit Committee was intended to generate savings in government expenditure. Are you telling us that the work of the Economic Audit Committee then did not actually progress that side of the policy of defining ways in which money can be saved by government in the way in which it spends its money?

Mrs Brown: The focus of the committee's work was on delivering more effective and efficient services to the Western Australian community, and that focused on the way in which they worked with each other and with partners to achieve that. Certainly in this report, it does not articulate any savings per se from a more efficient or effective delivery of services.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Is it then likely to lead to an increase in the cost of delivering services?

Mrs Brown: The heart of the committee's report is around delivering better outcomes and achieving that through working with others to better design and deliver those services to meet the community's needs. Its focus has not been on necessarily more cost effective services; it has been about getting better outcomes by working more closely with the community to understand their needs but also working with other key partners, including the community sector, to achieve that.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Are there cost implications in doing that?

Mrs Brown: In terms of progressing the directions —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Yes.

Mrs Brown: I suppose the key recommendations as outlined in their note refer to those that have been adopted by government. Certainly, as I mentioned, the Premier announced the establishment of the Partnership Forum, which is joint leaders of the public and community sector. The Premier announced the establishment of the social innovation grants program, which had a funding allocation of \$2 million in 2010–11 and \$4 million thereafter. The community development investment fund had a funding allocation of \$10 million in 2010–11 and \$20 million per annum thereafter. They are the key recommendations that have a financial implication that have been adopted by government.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: If you go back to the original economic audit, it raised a whole range of directions. These are, in my view, starting points, but they are not embracing and grabbing the real thrust of the report and implementing the report. They are good starts and they are the process by which you will be able to implement it. When will we see some real action in terms of things happening on the ground in implementing some of the directions of the report over and above the ones that are listed here?

[3.20 pm]

Mrs Brown: My role largely over the last 12 months has been to work quite closely with central agencies, line agencies in the public sector and with the community sector in progressing these directions. In a sense it has been an evolving process with them as we work through and consult with them on the implementation of those directions, the sequencing of them and the implications for implementation—bearing in mind some of the recommendations, particularly with the community sector. Working in partnership with them to progress those recommendations has been in recognition of some of the committee's findings and the recognition that if we are to progress in getting better outcomes and working with them we need to do that as part of the implementation process.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I guess that leads to the question: where are we up to in terms of resolving the issue about whether or not that sector is adequately funded today to do the tasks that it is asked to do?

Mrs Brown: Is your question: is the community sector adequately funded?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: My understanding is one of the things that has come out of the Partnership Forum is that the community sector says, “We’re not adequately funded to do the task and we can’t take on any further tasks without additional funding to do the tasks that we are currently doing; regardless of whether we move on to any new activities on behalf of the government.” Where are those discussions and negotiations up to? Is that something that falls into your —

Mrs Brown: I would say two things. One is that that was not an issue raised as part of the Economic Audit Committee’s report and, I suppose, is not contained within the key areas that the committee has set to discuss today. The broader question is, I think, one best put to the Premier’s office.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: As I understand it, it is an issue under active discussion in the Partnership Forum.

Mrs Brown: Yes.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: So that would come under your purview, I would have thought.

Mrs Brown: Yes.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: And secondly, I would have thought that those structural issues are pretty fundamental to your ability to implement the rest of the agenda that is outlined in the audit report, isn’t it? I mean, how do you actually implement the rest of the strategies if you do not get the starting point right?

Mrs Brown: I suppose my response was: they are not matters that were specifically raised by the Economic Audit Committee and the status of negotiations is a question best put to the Premier’s office.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: But if they were not specifically raised how can you have a document that recommends you go in a particular direction, but not consider something as fundamental as whether the starting point is actually valid or, you know, whether there are any problems with the current system before we move further down a path of expanding the current system?

Mrs Brown: The work of the Partnership Forum has been widely shared. At the conclusion of each Partnership Forum meeting, a communiqué is provided to the broader community sector and others to ensure openness in the discussions that happen between the two sectors. You are correct in that the issue has been raised as a key issue being progressed by the Partnership Forum, but I suppose the question is it was not a matter raised as part of the EAC. It has obviously come out of discussions with the Partnership Forum and your question about the status of negotiations is not one that can be answered under the status of the EAC report.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: To finish off, I am still unsure as to when we will see real action and real changes in the way in which the public service operates as a result of the Economic Audit Committee.

Mrs Brown: The audit committee released its report at the end of 2009. Government, in releasing the report said that it would consider its directions as part of 2010. And as outlined in the briefing note, key areas have been progressed in relation to reforms to public sector, in particular public sector management, work is underway in relation to those areas relating to development approvals and land and infrastructure planning under the government’s already-established ministerial task force on approvals development and sustainability. Other aspects around reforming the public sector, including building policy capacity and other aspects in the committee’s report, are being broadly progressed, both through the executive coordinating committee that was established by government last year, and also through joint work that is being progressed with the community sector. Other recommendations in relation to designing services to meet citizens needs—we have been working very closely with the community sector since early last year, and that included formulating joint advice on progressing and sequencing some of those directions including the

establishment of the social innovation grants program, the community development investment fund, the Partnership Forum and the work that has come from that. So there has been quite substantial progress in terms of large areas of the report and its directions, but the way in which they have been progressed has been done in partnership with some of those key areas in terms of getting their input on the direction and the sequencing and implementation of them.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Do you have a set of key milestones or goals that you expect—like a time line—for achieving key milestones as part of the implementation of the audit committee?

Mrs Brown: The recommendations as outlined in the briefing note are those that have been formally endorsed by government and those that we are working towards. Some of them have been operational since their announcement—so the establishment of the Partnership Forum and the executive coordinating committee. Progress has been made in relation to reforms to the Public Sector Management Act. We have outlined in the briefing note the status of those. In terms of other directions around working collaboratively with the community sector, they are ongoing and they will continue to be ongoing. As we progress them —

Mrs Brown: Do you have a time line for when you want to actually reach certain points of agreement with them about implementing some of the direction of the audit?

Mrs Brown: They are issues that are determined on a regular basis by the Partnership Forum.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: But you do not have a set of goals? You do not have a time line—by the middle of 2011 we want to be here and at the end of 2012 we want to be there—in terms of implementing changes within the public sector? It is my experience that if you do not have those time lines and goals, you can keep going forever and not actually come to a conclusion.

Mrs Brown: Our role is to work with those partners in establishing what is an appropriate time frame for delivering some of these reforms. We do not have set time frames around many of those aspects as we work in partnership with them. The Partnership Forum itself may establish its time frames for delivery of certain aspects. Certainly, some of their work around recommendations around reforming the contracting arrangements between the public and the community sector has been an ongoing discussion and that has been done again in partnership with the community sector. They have time frames being considered by the Partnership Forum for implementation, so the sorts of time frames that you are talking about are informed by our ongoing discussions with our key partners rather than setting up front a set of milestones, or an implementation plan, that are not informed by those key discussions.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: I am afraid that I have not read your report in the detail that it warrants, but I have noticed in the schedule of recommendations and who is accountable for carrying it out—the responsibility—the interesting thing is that I see it all being very top-heavy. For example, I do not see any mention of local government authorities—those who are closest to communities to identify what it is actually happening on the ground—mentioned anywhere in the recommendations in terms of responsibility. Are we assuming by this report that it is really at the very top that we are making all the decisions determining what the needs are?

Mrs Brown: A couple of things. I would say that this is the committee's report to government. Government's approach is outlined in the briefing note in relation to those recommendations and general directions in terms of the way we have worked, in terms of progressing the implementation or development of those directions. As I said, we have worked very closely with other government departments; we have worked very closely with the community sector; we have even involved local government in some of those discussions; and we are also now working with consumer representatives of the Health Consumers' Council WA. So your question about it appearing very top-heavy—that was the committee's report and direction. Our approach has probably picked up the model that you have been talking about, which is working more closely with the people on the ground.

[3.30 pm]

Certainly in our method of operation, we have been working to a model that is more akin to recognising that local knowledge and local engagement will drive better outcomes.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: So service delivery is in the hands of which level, in the main, as a result of this report? Is it in the hands of the departments and agencies, or is it in the hands of those who are on the ground in the communities, maybe linked and maybe integrated with the local government authorities?

Mrs Brown: The committee's report talks about the public sector moving away from being a direct provider to a facilitator of services; so it recognises that in some instances, not all, other providers are better placed to meet the needs and understand the needs of local communities.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: To use your terms, "provider", "service delivery" and "funder", we know where the funding had to come from, in the main. The providers can be the agencies, and various not-for-profit organisations. But the accountability for service delivery, then, would be the local government authorities at the ground level, if you like. Are you using the term "facilitator" to describe that mix, or are you using that term to mean the provider, ala Health for health, and Community Services for community work? Is that the facilitator or the provider in your terms?

Mrs Brown: The facilitator, in my understanding of the committee's thinking and direction, is more involved in the policy and planning around service delivery, and working in partnership with others to provide services on the ground. Another key direction of the committee's thinking was that those providers on the ground, and even communities themselves, in order to get better outcomes need to be more involved in the policy and planning of services.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: Okay. I hear the words, and a lot of that sounds good. But it is just the action. Is there a movement towards having a funder-provider-service delivery model emerge out of this report? Do you see it working in that way?

Mrs Brown: That was not a theme of the committee's report, to necessarily move to what would be termed more of a funder-purchaser role. What it talks about is public sector agencies moving to a role that involves more the facilitating of service delivery, and working with others that are better placed—in some instances, not in all instances—to meet the needs and understand the needs of their community, to get a better outcome.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: This is the problem that I have. How do you do that? If it is not a service provider model, what is the model for how you do that? What does it mean to be a facilitator, not a provider?

Mrs Brown: The committee's thinking and recommendations, from my understanding, draws on the experience of the disability services sector in Western Australia. Currently 60 per cent of the commission's services are contracted with the not-for-profit sector. The commission's role, from my understanding, is more of a policy-service delivery planning-sector development, and continues to provide services itself; but, as I said, approximately 60 per cent of its funding is issued in contracts to the not-for-profit sector for the delivery of services.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: Which really still is a centralised model, as you describe that particular case, I think. I would have thought that a decentralised model is one that is driven from the community or from a base level—from those who are in contact with disabled people, or those who are involved with disadvantaged people—and those parts of the community that know best are the local government authorities. Therefore, it seems to me that the accountability has been missed out in the report. It seems to me to be a very centralised model. In terms of costing, a centralised model is cheaper, because you have fewer people to deal with. You used the word "outcomes". I suspect that in terms of effectiveness, the outcomes will be compromised as a result of this structure. Do you have a comment on that?

Mrs Brown: In the case of the Disability Services Commission, they have a local area coordinator network, which attempts to achieve what you have just set out, which is a more localised approach to working closely with people with a disability, their families and their carers, to connect them with the services. In some instances, people with a disability and their families have individualised funding to access the services that they wish to purchase. So I think that the intent that you are seeking to achieve, which is a much more localised approach to understanding and meeting the needs of the community, was certainly a key theme of the committee's report, and in fact it is titled "Putting the Public First", but the mechanism by which that is achieved will be very different across the various areas of service delivery in the various sectors. So in the case of disabilities, a number of mechanisms over a number of years have worked quite effectively to build in a strong consumer input and engagement model through a range of mechanisms.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: Is the disability sector, as you have described it, the pilot for how this report is being applied?

Mrs Brown: Well, the commission itself has been on that journey for in excess of 15 years.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: With the same concentration on localising it and measuring the outcomes?

Mrs Brown: Well, you would probably need to refer those questions to the Minister for Disability Services. But my understanding is that as a jurisdiction, we have some of the nation's top outcomes in relation to disability services. I think the committee and the commission would acknowledge that there is probably more to be done, and recognising the growth in demand for services. But that has been a journey for some time in this state.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: I have one final question on that. You say that we are doing better than other states, and that may be the case, and that is fine. But with the changes that this report is probably going to lead to in the way that that is administered and implemented, are you aware of whether there will be benchmarks that will be measured so that we can see whether any of the changes that are made to the implementation have improved the situation and whether there are better outcomes, consistent with your view that this is all about better outcomes?

Mrs Brown: The report on government services, issued by the Productivity Commission, which is a national report, already looks at a range of indicators across key service delivery areas. There have not been any discussions about replicating that in other areas. Certainly the committee itself looked at issues around performance information in terms of is it intended that any sorts of benchmarks will be established to assess progress of the report; and at this stage, the answer is no.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: You are right. The report does refer to the KPIs being reviewed so that they are more relevant and so that we can measure the improved outcomes to which you alluded earlier.

Mrs Brown: Agencies on a regular basis, as part of their annual reporting and budget statements, review their outcomes frameworks against those criteria of relevance and usefulness and things like that. So that is already part of agency core business.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: Yes, you are right. That comes out of Treasury. But is that how the implementation of this report into KPIs would work? It would go through Treasury, would it, to make sure that the KPIs that the social outcomes will be measured against are different from those that might exist now? Is that the way it will work?

[3.40 pm]

There has not been any specific government response to the recommendations about performance information. That said, we would expect agencies on a regular basis to review their KPIs against that criteria, but also, in looking at areas that go across traditional boundaries, agencies would work together in looking at performance against those key indicators.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Ms Brown, I think committee members probably rightly expected that we could go to this document “Putting the Public First”, which made some 40-odd recommendations, some of them with perhaps quite significant economic impact providing they had been implemented—the recommendations made here were obviously very considered—and some year and a bit down the line we might have expected some progress on these recommendations. We also rightly expected that perhaps you were representative of a unit somewhere in Premier and Cabinet that was, in fact, coordinating all of the outcomes of these recommendations. That appears not to be the case. But what I do want to do is ask you some questions specifically in relation to some of the recommendations to see if you can provide us with at least some guidance in terms of what may be happening. The first is recommendation 2, that the executive coordinating committee of Chief Executive Officers be established and that they —

... be tasked with:

- a) leading the implementation of change in matters of whole of government significance;
- b) providing advice to Government on emerging issues and directions for agencies in relation to the implementation of Government policy and planning priorities; and
- c) enhancing and promoting collaborative approaches to problem solving.

Do you know if that committee has been formed and who chairs that committee?

Mrs Brown: If you turn to page 3 of the briefing note, dot point 3, the executive coordinating committee was established last year and held its first meeting in June 2010. It consists of a number of public sector agency heads. It is chaired by Peter Conran, the Director General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: It may well be that we should have Mr Conran in here, in all fairness to you, because I just think that some of the broader issues that certainly I was looking to canvass and some direction or insight into how we are progressing in terms of the full implementation of this report—it seems that it is probably a bit out of your jurisdiction because you tend to have a much more narrow focus. Whilst we are on that, I wonder whether I can ask you about the community hubs. I understand one of the recommendations was that there would be a piloting through the establishment of six community hubs. Can you explain to the committee how that is going, what it means practically and what you expect is the outcome?

Mrs Brown: Okay. In May last year the Premier announced the Partnership Forum. In supporting the Partnership Forum it was agreed to establish a community building steering group with representatives from public sector line agencies, ourselves, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Department of Treasury and Finance and members of the community sector. That steering group has been considering key directions around delivering services to meet citizens’ needs. As part of it that steering group has been looking at recommendation 10, which looks at the establishment of community hubs. The steering group’s discussions on this matter and all of the sort of directions being progressed both through the Partnership Forum, the community building steering group and the various working groups that have been looking at these key areas has been made publicly available through our website and through a newsletter that we have been issuing every two weeks to four weeks. So we have been quite open and transparent in the work that we have been doing with the community sector, including attending at a number of forums throughout 2010.

In relation to community hubs, the community sector’s key advice to us on this issue was that given the significant number of hubs that already exist in our communities and what they involve in both metropolitan and regional areas, there was a joint decision to establish a working group to progress this recommendation with a focus on looking at what already exists, what some of the outcomes are that have been sought through a community hubs-type approach and some of the lessons learnt. A working group was established in the second half of last year, again with representatives from the

public sector, including line agencies, from the community sector and from local government. It has met on several occasions, including in different locations throughout the metropolitan area with the next meeting scheduled for—I think it is later next week in Mandurah. That has really been about the public and community sectors working together to understand what already exists and works in this space. That was a strong recommendation from the community sector to explore that aspect.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Ms Brown, the sense that I get is that practically there has been very little in terms of the establishment of the community hubs; would that be correct? The actual establishment of the pilots of the six community hubs, are they —

Mrs Brown: Correct.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Is there a pilot for those six community hubs that is up and running?

Mrs Brown: No, correct.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: So some two years plus into the government we still do not have any, practically —

Mrs Brown: There have certainly been a number of community hubs progressed in that time frame both through the COAG agenda and through other work that has been happening, but it was certainly the strong advice from the community sector that we work together to understand what already exists and what makes that work and how we build on that.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Ms Brown, with all due respect a key recommendation of this report was to —

conduct six demonstration projects of community hubs in metropolitan, regional and remote areas.

I would say that that recommendation was made because they were going to be, perhaps, different to the hubs that already exist and, secondly, there was some wish by the people who brought down this report that we have a look at how the hubs may work in different areas—metropolitan, regional and remote—and how government and non-government services would actually work when they were brought together in this new model. What you have just told the committee is that none of these six new hubs are up and running as demonstration projects. You told us that there are already hubs out there that exist and you are all talking to the people who operate these hubs that are already there, but you have not established the six demonstration projects; is that correct?

Mrs Brown: Government has not endorsed that recommendation.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Do you know how many recommendations have not been endorsed by the government?

Mrs Brown: In terms of the briefing note, government initiatives that have been formed by the relevant recommendation—certainly the recommendations around public sector management reforms, the recommendation around establishment of the Partnership Forum and establishing a set of principles; that has been done. Recommendations around social innovation grants and community investment fund have been announced. The executive coordinating committee has been announced and the Amendola report was released by government on 6 December 2010. In addition to that, many of the directions and recommendations in the report have progressed or have informed broader thinking in government policy directions. A couple of key examples would certainly include the recommendations around looking to reform the contracting arrangements between the public and not-for-profit sectors. That has been the subject of significant work over the last six months between both sectors. Again, that information has been shared broadly.

[3.50 pm]

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Mrs Brown, I wonder whether you can provide the committee with a status report on each one of the recommendations that we have before us—that is, the 43 recommendations. If you cannot do it through your unit, and you probably cannot, I wonder whether you could —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Who does if it is not the unit?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Who does? Exactly right.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Surely someone must be doing that.

Mrs Brown: In terms of the status of the recommendations?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: All 43 of them; yes.

Mrs Brown: We can arrange a status of the directions of the committee. As the briefing note outlines and as I outlined previously, when the report was released, those 43 recommendations were not expressly adopted by the government. Broadly, the directions of the report, particularly around putting the public first, working and partnering with others, improving collaboration, communication and capacity across the public sector, those themes and directions of the Economic Audit Committee report have informed our work and the development of —

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is all very bureau-speak, in all due respects. What I would like, as a member of the committee, is to understand which of these recommendations have been fully adopted and which of them are not going to be adopted in part or fully. That, I know, is certainly what I would be interested to find out, and I would want to know precisely the information in relation to the subsets of each of the recommendations, because there is no doubt in my mind that I thought that this was a major plan for reform by the current government, and clearly that is not what appears to be the case. I am not having a go at you. Madam Chair, certainly from my point of view I am not so convinced that we can proceed. Well, I cannot proceed anyway.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: I just wanted to seek some clarification with regards to the six community hubs as a recommendation in that report. If I can just clarify, what you are really saying is that, whilst that was a recommendation of the report, when the whole thing then starts to take off and it is in reality, and they have now gone out there and they are starting to talk to the community sector, it has been found that a lot of those things are already there, existing, and that it might be better rather than to reinvent a further six community hubs, we value-add to those that are already existing so that they can start operating in perhaps a more efficient and effective manner. Is that what you are saying? It is, like, nothing is set in concrete there. Listen to what the sector wants out there and then implement what it is that is really needed.

Mrs Brown: Yes. I suppose the key points I would make are that the report itself, or the essence of it, is about focusing on the needs of communities and understanding those needs. It is also about working with others. Whilst the committee made a number of recommendations, certainly those that relate to the community sector we have worked in partnership with them to understand the implications of those directions, those recommendations, the sequencing, taking into account the impact that that would have on the community sector and progressing these in a meaningful way in partnership. In relation to the community hubs, as I said, there was strong advice from the community sector to work through what already exists, and how do we learn from that and make sure that future investment or decisions in this space is informed by what is already on the ground. Certainly, the community sector highlighted as a priority those recommendations around establishing a partnership in the Partnership Forum; certainly around the social innovation grants and Community Development Investment Fund. So the way in which the recommendations have been prioritised, and the directions of the committee's thinking more generally, have been done in partnership with the community sector. That includes even the way in which we build policy capacity in the public sector, which has been progressed jointly with key people in the community sector in terms of learning from them, in terms of how we build that capacity together.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I think you just said how you prioritised the recommendations was done in consultation or partnership with the community sector. Can you tell us what are now the priorities that you have prioritised with the community sector? Is there a list of how you have prioritised the recommendations?

Mrs Brown: Both the Partnership Forum and other work that we progressed jointly with the community sector has been made widely available through our website and newsletter.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: That is not all; that is not the sum.

Mrs Brown: No; those that relate primarily to the way in which we work with the community sector. Certainly, as I have noted, government has endorsed those recommendations relating to the Partnership Forum, the social innovation grants and the Community Development Investment Fund.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Do you have a priority list for the recommendations of how you prioritise the recommendations for implementation?

Mrs Brown: No. However, the Partnership Forum has through its discussions set out how it wishes to progress key areas of working.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: So the Partnership Forum has prioritised the areas that it is looking at. What about the rest of the report?

Mrs Brown: The recommendations?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Has the government prioritised the rest of the other recommendations?

Mrs Brown: As I said, the government has not formally endorsed any of the recommendations. The key directions and themes underpinning the report have previously and will continue to inform thinking in terms of development, direction and implementation.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Recommendation 24: “Attract, develop and retain people with the skills and expertise involved in procurement and contract management for public service delivery by private sector partners, to enable them to ...” and then it goes through the four areas. How do you actually progress anything if you do not do recommendation 24? How do you develop a better partnership with the private sector and get them to deliver more services for you and become the facilitator unless someone is doing something about recommendation 24?

Mrs Brown: My understanding is that the underlying direction and objective around that recommendation has been picked up in Treasury core business going forward. The recommendations around, certainly, 13, 14 and 15 have been the subject of significant work over the last six months between the public and community sector, which is about reforming the contracting arrangements between the public and community sector. That, again, is very much informed by the community sector’s thinking in this space—that, again, a joint working group of the public and community sector with representatives from the community sector have been involved in that work.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: On the same issue, in that scene you describe, Rebecca, who then are the champions to whom you are looking to drive the action? Who are the champions of the movement, if you like, of the service that is going to be delivered? Is it the agency? Is it the directors general? Who are the champions of getting the movement to drive the delivery of the service, of the scene you just described, to take place?

Mrs Brown: Consistent with other government policy directions, as I have noted, the directions and themes within the report have informed government direction going forward. The way in which it is overseen and implemented is consistent with other government policy going forward. For example, in the case of the relationship between a public sector agency and the community sector, the way in which those contracting reforms would be implemented would be consistent with existing accountability arrangements.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: It does get back to the bureaucratise in a way, which is hard to put your finger on who is going to make the thing really work and change. Can I come at this another way? You have got the executive coordinating committee, which consists of a number of public sector agency heads. That sounds good. Its role is to advise government on strategic issues.

[4.00 pm]

Can I just explore a little bit about how that might work? Are they directors general of particular agencies that are meeting every so often? Do they put in their input to say that this is the strategic direction that they want to take place and to work out something on it? Is that how it works? Or are they getting people to come in to that committee from the outside to propose strategic initiatives that can then be taken up?

Mrs Brown: It is probably a combination. The executive coordinating committee is focused on promoting collaboration, communication and capacity building across the public sector. That may involve the executive coordinating committee considering issues of cross-sector implementation and issues within their own departments, certainly on matters that are outside their expertise or knowledge, which seek to engage others in gaining that expertise. But it is really about building a more collaborative approach to working across the public sector at that senior level.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: Will those directors general who are considering strategic initiatives, either internally or from an external source be the ones who will be deciding on the merits and the adoption, or will it go back to the respective ministers of, I presume, the departments, to get approval for the funding to enable it to be driven? Is that the way it would work?

Mrs Brown: The executive coordinating committee is not a body that considers or signs off issues of policy; it is about implementation of policy or the operation of the public sector more generally, so they are issues around collaboration, coordination and capacity building.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: Okay, so its role of advising government on strategic issues is not quite right, I would have thought; from what you have just said, its role is more about coordinating departments and other resources to carry out strategic initiatives that have already been approved.

Mrs Brown: Certainly, but it might be about the capacity to deliver on those issues. For example, it might be about workforce development and planning, and things like that. It is about the operation of the public sector.

The CHAIR: I might have missed something, but who is on that committee?

Mrs Brown: There are three standing members—Peter Conran, the Director General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, as chair; Tim Marney, the Under Treasurer; and Mal Wauchope, the Public Sector Commissioner. In addition to them, there are two other standing members from the Department of Health and the Department of Education. There are also three other sector representatives nominated by the chair.

The CHAIR: Can I just go back to what I think I heard fairly early on in the questions? Was I right in understanding that this report did not actually audit where the sector was at in terms of establishing a baseline from which you can then make recommendations in terms of the existing capacity, what was doing well and what needed to be done better? It seems to me that if you did not start from that point, how do you know where you are going to go? Perhaps you could explain.

Mrs Brown: My understanding is that the committee did not make recommendations of that nature.

The CHAIR: Right.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: It did not do a review of the current situation, it just went ahead and came up with all these great ideas for the future. That is my reading of it.

Mrs Brown: I suspect that during its deliberations it may have done that, but it looked to questions of how we deliver better outcomes for Western Australia.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: You did talk about benchmarking, though, somewhere around there. Is that what you were referring to?

The CHAIR: I am just trying get a sense of the start.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: You were talking about benchmarking, but the response to the report does not benchmark.

The CHAIR: I think, to be fair, and with no offence to you, it is my impression that perhaps we might need to speak to somebody else to answer some of these questions, because it seems to me that the implementation of things has moved on to another place.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: Do members want to pursue further questions, or shall we reconsider where we go?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Reconsider.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I just have one final question. You put a lot of emphasis on the Disability Services Commission. Has there been an analysis of why the Disability Services Commission is successful and what the key elements are in that sector that make it successful, and whether they will then transfer to other sections of government? Is anyone doing that work, that you are aware of?

Mrs Brown: Some of the recommendations or some of the directions in there, and certainly some of the commentary in the report, refers to what works well in the Disability Services Commission and the sector more generally. My understanding is that that was based on stakeholder input engagement throughout the committee's deliberations, but also through work in terms of the performance of our sector relative to other jurisdictions. In terms of how it relates to other sections or sectors of service delivery, some of the underlying principles may inform it, but I think that there is a general view in the community sector that what works in the disability sector will not necessarily, in some aspects, translate to other areas. There are just different demographic profiles and the nature of service delivery is quite different.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The community response to the sector, for a start, is different. People are far more prepared to become engaged with the disability sector than a range of other community sectors, I would have thought. As a starting point, you have lots of families engaged heavily and actively as advocates within the disability sector. Not every other sector of government has that. It has had growth funding for the last 15 years at least, that I am aware of. In every single year, it has had growth funding from governments of both political persuasions. That makes it easier to do what you do in the disability sector. I mean, there is still more work to do, but it is a key factor in what makes it successful. I would have thought you would need to be doing that analysis if we are placing all our store on the disability sector as the model.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Brown. I will have to make a closing statement to conclude the hearing. If the committee has additional questions, we will forward them to you via the minister, in writing, over the next couple of days, together with the transcript of evidence, which includes the questions you have taken on notice. If members have any unasked questions, please submit them at the close of this hearing. If there are additional responses to these questions, we request to have them within 10 days of receipt of the questions. Should the agency be unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. Finally, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for your attendance today. We appreciate your assistance in this and we will close the hearing now. Thanks very much.

Hearing concluded at 4.08 pm
