

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND
FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

2013–14 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARINGS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER 2013**

**SESSION THREE
DEPARTMENT FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND FAMILY SUPPORT**

Members

**Hon Ken Travers (Chair)
Hon Peter Katsambanis (Deputy Chair)
Hon Martin Aldridge
Hon Alanna Clohesy
Hon Rick Mazza**

Hearing commenced at 7.03 pm**Hon HELEN MORTON****Minister for Child Protection, examined:****Ms KAY BENHAM****Acting Director General, examined:****Mr PETER BYRNE****Executive Director, Community and Business Services, examined:****Ms PHILIPPA BEAMISH-BURTON****Acting Director, Finance, examined:**

The CHAIR: On behalf of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I would like to welcome you to today's hearing. Witnesses before the committee are required to read and sign a document headed "Information for Witnesses". Can you confirm for the benefit of Hansard if you have read and signed a copy of this document?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: For the benefit of Hansard, can you confirm that you understand the document that you have signed?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Witnesses need to be aware of the severe penalties that apply to persons providing false or misleading testimony to a parliamentary committee. It is essential that all your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private, either of its own motion or at the witness's request. 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 before answering the question.

These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. The committee reminds agency representatives to respond to questions in a succinct manner and to limit the extent of personal observations. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you refer to during the course of this hearing for the record; and please be aware of the microphones and try to talk into them. Ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make noise near them. Members, it will greatly assist Hansard if when referring to the budget statements volumes or the consolidated account estimates, you give the page number, item, program, amount, and so on in preface to your questions.

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. The committee values your assistance with this.

For the benefit of members and Hansard, I ask the minister to introduce her advisers to the committee, and for each adviser to please state their full name and the capacity in which they appear before the committee.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: Members, are there any questions?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Minister, I want to start with the observations that are made in various places in the budget papers about the increase in the number of children and young people coming into care. I doubt that you need references but page 565, note 1, page 566, note 1, and we also have the significant issues impacting the agency on page 563, dot points 1 and 3. I understand the point that you will want to make—that the rate of increase is slowing—but nevertheless, we are still looking at around six per cent per year, which, according to my calculations, is about 240 extra children a year coming into care. Is that correct?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is about 200.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Two hundred per year. Okay. I note also—I think it is dot point 3 on page 563—that the budget papers refer to a growing number of children and young people with complex needs and challenging behaviours. Do you have a sense of how that particular number is growing?

Hon HELEN MORTON: About the number of children with complex and challenging behaviours?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I will just rewind a bit. I will give you a bit more preamble so you can think about the way you are going to answer it. We have about 4 000 children in care. The budget papers show that the rate of increase is about 200, a bit less than six per cent a year. The budget papers talk about a growing number of children. I understand that to mean that perhaps a growing percentage of those children have complex needs and challenging behaviours. Those “complex needs” and “challenging behaviours”, I imagine, are phrases that cover a whole raft of things. Basically, these children need some kind of extra care, extra protection, both for their own sakes because they are a danger to themselves and for the people around them. Can you give any quantitative information about how those rates are increasing?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Are you looking for an idea of around about what those numbers are?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I refer to dot point 3 on page 563, which states —

There are a growing number of children and young people with complex needs and challenging behaviours who are a risk to themselves and/or others in the community, and require individualised care arrangements.

Ms Benham: The net growth in the number of children in care—that is, the net number—grows by around 200 a year, taking into account that children leave as well as enter care. That is a growth rate of about five per cent, which is a considerable reduction over the past five years. Having said that, it is also certainly correct to say that a significant proportion of children have very complex needs, and that that number is growing. There are 201 in what we call high needs placements. These are the children and young people with the most complex needs.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is 201 children out of about 4 000?

Ms Benham: In this very top category; that is correct. That number has grown. I would also say, in response to your question, that generally the children who are in care probably overall have more complex needs as well.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Overall, so even ones who are not in the highest category?

[7.10 pm]

Ms Benham: As a general statement the children coming into care have probably more complex needs than what they did some years ago.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The director general said that about five per cent of the children are in that highest category. How does that compare with two years, four years, five years or six years ago, and 10 years ago might there have been one per cent in that highest category and now there is five per cent? That is what I am trying to get a feel for.

Ms Benham: I do not have the numbers categorically over that period of time. It is certainly fair to say that we have built up that specialist sector over the years. We had a major reform of residential care facilities, both those we contract out to the non-government sector and those we run ourselves. Predominantly, what we call tier 1 family group homes are operated by the non-government sector, and tier 2 residential group homes are run by the department. Tier 2 homes have children with more complex needs in those settings. We also run secure care, which is a new service that came into operation a couple of years ago. It is difficult to compare numbers in those types of placements, because we have reformed the sector so much over the past five years.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Have those actual categories changed? You referred to the 201 children in tier 1.

Ms Benham: Yes, they have. We used to have much larger residential care facilities, where we had up to perhaps 12 young people living in what were not ideal settings, and five years ago we commenced a major reform program whereby we purchased and developed four-bed facilities for those young people, which is a major step forward with a much more therapeutic environment than occurred five years ago.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The director general is talking about the concrete arrangements, the practical arrangements, made for where those children are placed, but has there been a change in the classification of tier 1? Tier 1 comprises children with the most complex needs and the most challenging behaviour.

Ms Benham: They would be tier 3, in terms of secure care with a 21-day placement with strict criteria for entry and so on. Over and above that we also have what we call specialised placements. Predominantly, there are three groups—disability placements, specialised fostering and transitional high needs placements. Those three groups I just spoke of comprise currently 204 placements.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is that for tier 1 and tier 2?

Ms Benham: No, that is for that group we call high needs placements, which are disability, transitional and specialised. In addition, we have tier 1 family group homes, tier 2 residential group homes and tier 3 secure care.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What is the relationship between the 201 children you said were in tier 1 and —

Ms Benham: There were not 201 children in tier 1. The figure of 201 is those children in very high needs non-government fee-for-service placements.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: They are the children with the most challenging behaviour and the most need. What data can you provide—I do not mind if you take this on notice—to substantiate the fact there are a growing number of children and young people in that category?

Ms Benham: The numbers in those highest category, if you like, are those that are the fee-for-service high needs placements in those three categories of disability, transition and specialised has grown over the years. We could get the member those numbers for those specific placements. I do not think we have with us the numbers over the past five years.

[Supplementary Information No C1.]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: When we talk about children with complex needs and challenging behaviour, what sort of kids are we talking about?

Ms Benham: It is a range, and obviously it is very hard to categorise all kids, but typically these young people will have severe disabilities, some of them need 24-hour-a-day care, and some of these young people have quite significant drug and alcohol problems. Quite often they are a risk to themselves of self-harm, and other people could be at risk from their behaviour as well. Some of them have significant offending behaviour, including sexual offences against other children. It is

fair to say they have all been subjected to trauma of one form or another. They have significant attachment issues and significant behavioural issues, such that this particular group of children cannot be cared for in a typical foster family with other children.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Would some of them be in the juvenile justice system?

Ms Benham: Yes, a large number are in and out of the juvenile justice system.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can they be in detention and in the care of the director general?

Ms Benham: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I know we have put that question on notice for the figures over the past five years, but the director general must have some idea of the extent to which this is an increasing problem.

Ms Benham: In terms of the budget, I can give the member some information. We have put an additional \$8.5 million into those fee-for-service places this year, and the same last year. That probably gives the member some indication.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is the cost per child the cost that is on page whatever it is?

Ms Benham: I can probably get the member the total amount.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is it \$191 a day, which is on page 565 under “Key Efficiency Indicators” as the average cost per child per day in the CEO’s care.

Ms Benham: No, that is overall. That is all children in care.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Have you got this broken down in any other way?

Ms Benham: We do not have a dollar cost.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can I take that as supplementary information?

Ms Benham: We have fee-for-service placements. I am trying to think how many additional placements that would involve. We would have to go back and calculate that. The thing to understand with these placements is that they range considerably. A small number of these placements cost us up to \$1.4 million a year. These are children with very high needs, 24-hours-a-day rostered care with two carers around the clock.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is the basis of my question, because \$8.5 million might boil down to four or six children. That is the figure I am trying to get.

Ms Benham: Some of them cost a lot less than that, and we can give the member the average cost.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The director general has already said that 200 new children have come into care for the first time.

[7.20 pm]

Ms Benham: That is the net figure.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes, a net figure. Do you have anything that will tell you how many of those children, the new ones in the last 12 months, come into that category of having complex needs and challenging behaviours?

Ms Benham: Some of them will have been in, if you like, other types of placements and they will move into these specialised places, so they can be the same children that we are talking about. They may move, for instance, in and out of the tier 1 family probably to a tier 2 residential group home. They might have a period in secure care. They may then be transitioned into one of the high-needs placements. If their needs are such that they need a specialised wraparound placement that meets their particular needs, they cannot be placed in a group setting or a family setting. That is why it is a difficult question to answer categorically with the numbers because they do move across the system depending on their needs at the point of time. And I should say, too, that for instance with the

transitional high-needs group, by the nature of the name, what we are trying to do is transition them out of those very high-cost, high-intensive placements into other placements that are not as intensive. So, it is a moving —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I understand what you are saying. Maybe if I can summarise what I understand you are saying very briefly, you can tell if I am right. What you are saying is that the rate of increase in that number of children with complex needs may not directly correlate with the number of new children that you have taken into care in the last 12 months.

Ms Benham: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It may be children who are already in care who have been moved into that category.

Ms Benham: Correct.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: In that case, and I think you might have to take this as a supplementary question, of the children who came into care in the last 12 months for the first time, could you find out for us how many of those had complex needs and challenging behaviours?

Ms Benham: What I would be able to tell you would be how many of the children who came into care for the first time went into one of these high-needs placements.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes.

Ms Benham: They would be very small in number. There might be some in the disability area certainly, but there would be very few. More normally we would start in a lower level, if you like, more family-based placement, perhaps residential care where possible.

The CHAIR: Do you want that information that can be provided as supplementary?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes. The acting director general said that it will be a small number but, yes, it would be good for the record to have that.

[Supplementary Information No C2.]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I have just revised my understanding of that third dot point, as I had taken it to mean that there were more children coming into care who were classified as having complex needs et cetera, but now you are saying that some of these children are moving around the system and they are developing more complex needs.

Ms Benham: No, I would say both. But I think it is very hard to give you specific numbers about which particular category of complexity a child would sit in; and they vary from day to day. But that point is about that we do have, what we do see, and it is partly because we work very hard in not bringing children into care unless we absolutely have to for their safety needs.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is the next question I am just about to move on to.

Ms Benham: If I can say, though, if we can support the family with supports through their networks and in the community, that is our preferred option. And so, when we do bring children into care, they will generally have a fairly high degree of need.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes, I understand the point you are making. With respect, minister, and I will just refer back to the minister because I am just about to say something quite rude, so I will say it to you, minister.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Political, you mean?

The CHAIR: Hopefully not unparliamentary.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Definitely not unparliamentary. The reason I am raising this, please understand, is because it is in the budget as a significant cost pressure to the department. The growing numbers of children is there as a cost pressure. I just ask you to respond to my question

about why you do not have more specific data that you can give us about the rate of increase and the rate of the costs. What is this cost pressure associated with the increasing number of children with complex needs?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Do not forget that the increase in funding that has been provided for child protection in this particular year is over \$20 million, so it is \$21.8 million.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes, but none of it has gone to child protection staff, has it? None of it has gone to caseworkers.

Hon HELEN MORTON: It has all gone to the provision of services for children.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes, but none of it has gone to the staffing levels, which have flatlined now for four years.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I had a feeling that that was what your questions were around—about the full-time equivalent issue. And if that is what your question is about, then let me answer it this way. The FTE levels are looking flat on the paper, but that does not mean that is the total FTE of the agency. It is possible, for example, under the changes that are taking place—as you have asked me questions around legal services and the way in which the numbers around the legal services are changing—that we can convert some of those FTEs into childcare workers or child protection officers.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am very clear about a process that is taking place in Wyndham at the moment, which is about realigning the number of FTEs that are required for the number of children there.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: In Wyndham, did you say?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes, in Wyndham. And the numbers will then create some efficiencies that will move into other areas, so there is a constant movement; 37 per cent of children provided with foster care now are being provided with foster care in the not-for-profit sector. There is also some casework that is being undertaken in the not-for-profit sector. And as this work is outsourced, then the FTE that had previously been assigned to doing that work is realigned within the agency. I am again assured that the numbers that are there are the numbers that are required. At the moment I think the industrial requirements are that there is around about 15 cases per caseworker. The average caseworker caseload at the moment is about 12.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes, and 12 is the first number.

Hon HELEN MORTON: So there is always some flexibility that can be found within the current system. If the average number is 12, that means there are people with fewer than 12 and there are people with more than 12. So there is flexibility within the system to accommodate the various changes that are taking place. But having said all of that, at the moment you know that we have a salary cap rather than an FTE cap, and if there was a requirement for the agency to look at some additional FTEs, that is not going to be a big deal one way or the other; we can do that. But at the moment it is not a requirement.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is that your judgement that it is not a requirement, or are you relying on the —

Hon HELEN MORTON: No. Absolutely you can ask the director general directly, if you like. But I am assured by the director general—although I do not know if I have had this conversation with the acting director general—that the numbers are sufficient to cover the services that are required. But I am more than happy for the acting director general to speak.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: No, I am happy with that, as I have heard you say it many times before and I will come back to this.

The CHAIR: I am sorry, Hon Sally Talbot, do you mind if I just interrupt on that point?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes; sure.

The CHAIR: I am trying to understand what you just said, minister, that when you contract out you keep your FTE but the FTE is not then held against the contracted-out workers. Is that what you were saying earlier?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The work that is contracted out is foster-care work.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Hon HELEN MORTON: And there is some case management that is undertaken as an outsource.

The CHAIR: But if you were previously doing that work in-house and you had an FTE assigned to doing that work, when you contract it out to a third party, are you saying that you still maintain your FTE and you do not have to use the FTE against the contractor?

Hon HELEN MORTON: No. What I am saying is, because you are asking the question about the flatlining of FTE numbers only —

The CHAIR: No, I am not asking that.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I know what you are asking but I am going to answer it this way. If you are flatlining the FTEs, regardless of what those FTEs are being used for, the numbers are still the same. But if you are using growth money to outsource a service but you still only have the same FTEs that you had in the agency to continue to do more work, then you can do more work because you have a so-called spare FTE that you can do it with.

The CHAIR: No, minister. My understanding of the way the FTE works is that even if you are contracting out work, you should still be holding it against an FTE; it does not matter whether you provide it in-house or externally. And I accept your point now about the salary cap, which is in many respects a tighter control than even the FTE cap, for instance. You also mentioned moving legal services.

[7.30 pm]

Hon HELEN MORTON: The legal services have been rearranged. Some of the legal services have gone to —

The CHAIR: Did the FTEs go with those?

Hon HELEN MORTON: No; not all of them. There were some efficiencies that were found in that process.

The CHAIR: That is good.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Absolutely. Some of the FTEs went to the Attorney General's department—I think there were two. I will ask Ms Benham to respond further.

Ms Benham: We had four FTE, and two of those went to the State Solicitor's Office. That is in terms of lawyers. There were also some administrative staff and some legal support officers. The two remaining lawyer officers are awaiting placement, so we will see how that pans out. But the legal support officers and the administrative officers have remained.

The CHAIR: Can I confirm from the financial officer, minister, that when you employ people as contractors, you now no longer require FTEs for those positions?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Obviously I will ask Peter Byrne to make a comment about that.

Mr Byrne: No. If we are pushing work into the community sector, we can reassign the FTEs. So we are not losing the FTEs centrally or anything like that. We can re-assign them.

The CHAIR: So when you put work out to the private sector, do you get additional money to do that?

Hon HELEN MORTON: As I said before, there is \$21 million worth of growth funding.

The CHAIR: So do you replace your existing in-house services with that growth funding?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is across-the-board. We use some of it for this and some of it for that, and some of it for purchasing services from the not-for-profit sector.

The CHAIR: I do not know whether this will be of use to Hon Sally Talbot, but as part of supplementary information C3, could we get a breakdown of how that growth funding has been allocated, particularly in terms of whether it is for purchasing services, and the functions that it is used for internally?

Ms Benham: I can give that to you now. We had \$21.8 million of recurrent demand funding. That has been allocated to fee-for-service placements, which are those three category placements that I spoke about earlier—the disability and the transitional high needs. We have allocated \$8.5 million for that. In addition, we have allocated \$2.5 million for 45 community-based foster care placements. Thirty-five of those are out to tender currently in country regions, and 10 will be used in metropolitan areas. We have also allocated \$2.1 million for foster care subsidies. That goes to the increase in the number of children coming into care, so the net 200 that we talked about. Clearly the carers of those children require subsidies. We have also allocated \$1.5 million extra to residential care. That is in recognition of the operational costs in residential care, particularly for casual staff for covering leave, sick leave, training and so on. That is predominantly what that funding is for. There is an additional \$1.2 million for case support costs. Again, that is directly attributable to the increase in the number of children coming into care. We allocate on average \$5 000 per child for costs in addition to their foster care subsidy.

We are also providing \$500 000 for five years for two new family support networks, one in the Murchison and one in Mirrabooka. That is about community sector agencies working with us in partnership. Again, it goes back to the point about trying to keep children safe at home with their families. We are providing additional funding support in the community to enable that to happen.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is that the Armadale model?

Ms Benham: Yes, indeed.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: How much was it for those two services?

Ms Benham: It is an additional \$500 000.

The CHAIR: Is this per annum?

Ms Benham: This is per annum. It is recurrent.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is it \$500 000 for each?

Ms Benham: The Mirrabooka one is a bit different from the Murchison one. For the Murchison one, we are providing a child protection worker and some other support. Most of the Murchison is being funded through two mining companies in the Murchison region. We are doing that in partnership with Parkerville. The mining companies are funding Parkerville for their part of the network, and we are providing our costs on top of that. So it is less than the money that we allocated for Armadale. We will be allocating \$500 000 recurrently to Mirrabooka. But because that will not come on line until February, in this year we will need only half of that amount.

The remainder of that \$21.8 million in recurrent growth funding is being spent on escalation costs around salaries, government regional officer housing and contracting costs.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What was that last figure?

Ms Benham: It was \$5.47 million.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: How did you decide on that Murchison centre? Was it based on need or was it based on the fact that the mining companies gave you some dollars for that?

Ms Benham: It was a bit of both. The Murchison is one of the areas that we had identified as a good place to put a network. But it was partly opportunistic as well, in the sense that the mining companies were obviously in discussions with Parkerville and were willing to fund it. So we have been quite happy for these to grow organically where they can. It is a bit the same with Mirrabooka. Although Mirrabooka is very much up there in terms of our high-priority areas, part of the decision was made on the readiness of the community, and the community sector agencies in particular, to work together to support a model like this. So in Mirrabooka, a group of agencies came to us very much wanting us to support this model and what was already happening in Mirrabooka.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Chair, I am wondering whether there is any way in which those numbers that have just been given to us could be tabled, because I have some further questions on some of those things, and if that information could be tabled, I would be able to ask those questions,

The CHAIR: Do you have a document that you can table?

Ms Benham: I am looking at the finance person. I will provide to the member a breakdown of the spending changes.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Further to the question that was asked by Hon Sally Talbot about the 4 000 children who are in the care of the CEO, how many of the 201 children who have been identified as having complex needs and challenging behaviours are Aboriginal?

Ms Benham: It is certainly a significant proportion. I do not have the breakdown of that. But also, having said that, this is a moving population, so on any given day it will change. I would suggest that probably over half of them would be Aboriginal children.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Would you be able to provide that by way of supplementary information, say as of 1 September, given that it is a moveable feast?

Ms Benham: We will provide information as to, as on 1 September, how many of those children were Aboriginal.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes, please.

[Supplementary Information No C3.]

[7.40 pm]

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Could I ask, if it is acceptable to Hon Stephen Dawson, whether that information could include the category that I think is now called CALD—culturally and linguistically diverse? It used to be non-English speaking background. Could I also ask whether the information could be extended to the subset of around 4 000 as well as to the entirety of the 4 000 or so population, which you may have with you?

Ms Benham: We can give you the data right now of the Aboriginality of the nearly 4 000 children we have in care. We can give you information on CALD as well. It is a little more difficult, just because it depends how you categorise it. Some of our data entry is not quite as good on the CALD population. For Aboriginality, as at the end of June, there were 1 960 Aboriginal children in care, so it is close to half.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: You do not have the figure on CALD?

Ms Benham: No, I do not.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: If you could take that as part of the supplementary information, I would appreciate it. I realise that your statistics might not pick up every single nuance. I do not think anyone really understands where you draw the line and whether it is a black line or a fuzzy line in relation to that.

The CHAIR: That is all under supplementary information C3.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: With those 201 Aboriginal children, are they in the metropolitan area or not? They are in the care of the CEO, but they are not all being cared for by an NGO; is that correct?

Ms Benham: All of those 201 I have just spoken about in those categories of placements are being cared for by non-government organisations. They are fee-for-service placements. It is very specialised for those particular children.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure; but that is right around the state?

Ms Benham: Yes. Most of them are in the metropolitan area.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: If you do have some figures on how many children are in the Kimberley and the Pilbara in particular, could I ask for that by way of supplementary as well?

Ms Benham: Yes. I can give you the breakdown of all children by region right now, but in terms of those specialised placements in that subset, I would need to take it on notice.

The CHAIR: Does the member want it now or shall we get it all as supplementary information?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am happy to have it as supplementary.

[Supplementary Information No C4.]

The CHAIR: Does a member of the committee want to move that this document be made public?

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Hon Alanna Clohesy. That document is now public, so we can distribute it to the other participants in the hearing tonight.

I think poor old Hon Sally Talbot was interrupted. Is she still going on that line of questioning?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I have a couple more questions on that same line of questioning, which is to do with the rate of increase of children coming into care. We are looking at the rate having slowed to less than six per cent from, I think, a high of 15 per cent, was it, a few years ago?

Ms Benham: It was 13 per cent, I believe.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Minister, you put this decrease in the rate of increase down to the use of Signs of Safety. Can you tell us why that works?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will have a good go at it. It is also about the level of family support services that are now being provided to families. During the Signs of Safety framework that is undertaken—this is my understanding of it—there is a much greater level of participation with family members and the children in recognising what is required for that particular family for the children to stay safe and how that can be put in place. That is very much a collaborative partnership arrangement that is undertaken with the families, Child Protection and the children, when the children are able to participate in that. In that process, solutions and decisions are made around how families can provide a safer environment for their children and the child protection officers are willing to look at these. There are arrangements that can be put in place, they will be monitored et cetera. As a result of that, through the Signs of Safety program, the safety plans are identified and agreed by everybody and signed off on. On the basis of that, it has been found that this rate has decreased. These families are prepared to actually approach this more as a partnership arrangement with Child Protection, rather than Child Protection taking a rather authoritarian approach.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So you are talking about Signs of Safety being used to keep children out of care—to keep them in their own homes.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Sometimes these children are still in the care of the CEO but at home with the family. Sometimes they are being monitored, but sometimes they can be kept out of the care of the CEO. Through all those processes, you will find that the number of children coming into the care of the CEO has reduced—when I say “reduced”, I mean the rate has reduced—but the

number of children who are able to stay in their home environment has increased and the number of children who are in care and going home has increased as well.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Does the department keep records of the number of cases in which it administers a Signs of Safety assessment and the child is not taken into care—the child stays at home and is not taken into the care of the CEO? Do you have those numbers?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The children who are assessed?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes. The Signs of Safety approach is taken, so that means that, presumably, a safety plan is put in place, but the child is not taken into care.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes, we do have that information. Obviously, the number of children who are assessed is identified as a distinct number and then the number of children who are taken into the care of the CEO is identified as a distinct number.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Have you got the children who are not taken into care broken down by region?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: While you are looking for that data, do those children have ongoing contact with a Child Protection officer—a caseworker?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The answer is that some do; it depends on the circumstances around each individual child. I am just asking what circumstances would require some to have ongoing monitoring and some to not.

Ms Benham: I can give you some indication, because there are probably a number of elements to that discussion that just occurred. I am trying to find the data that shows the number of applications. It is in the quarterly report.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You have the most extraordinary mobile filing system behind you, minister!

Ms Benham: I think one of the things with our department is that we have so much data and it is very complicated because there are so many different factors that impact.

The CHAIR: Feel free to just table your files if it helps!

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am happy to take this on notice.

Ms Benham: If I can give it to you now, it would probably be useful. If I give you a quarter figure, it will give you a good indication. At the end of the July quarter, there were 4 428 initial inquiries; that is, people ringing up with concerns about children. We had in that same period for the same quarter 3 057 safety wellbeing assessments. That is where we have done a Signs of Safety assessment with that family and we had 327 applications.

[7.50 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What is an application?

Ms Benham: Care and protection applications.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What happened to the other 2 000?

Ms Benham: The rest of them did not need to come to care.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: No, but you administered the Signs of Safety tests to them—you went to the Signs of Safety assessment and they were found not to be subject to a care order?

Ms Benham: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Were they subject to a safety plan? What proportion of them ended up with that?

Ms Benham: There would be a range of outcomes for those families. For some of them we would decide that there was no need for any further action at all. A significant proportion of them would be referred for family support. For a proportion of them also, we have a second category called child-centred family support, which is provided by specialist teams of workers in our department.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Would those two things be provided under service 3?

Ms Benham: Child-centred family support is service 2; family support is service 3 for the way we divide up our work. It could be a range of things.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: How many of them ended up being monitored with a safety plan, but not taken into the protection of the CEO?

Ms Benham: We probably could not give that data. We can extrapolate from that figure that a good proportion of them have a safety plan. I can give the breakdown in terms of how many of those were then closed with no further action, but we could not give you with any certainty the number that had monitoring visits or those that had family support.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: But is the monitoring not done by your child protection officers?

Ms Benham: Yes, quite a lot of it, but often we are doing it in partnership with community sector agencies as well, which provide family support. We provide a significant amount of funding for agencies—for example, the Armadale Family Support Network. Some of those families would get support services through the Family Support Network, but a range of others as well. There are so many variables as to how services are put into place for a family. We would generally not have a case opened just for monitoring without doing something fairly active with that family. There will be a range of circumstances, depending on the individual needs of the family, in terms of ongoing support.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: We have got about 3 000 cases a quarter that have the Signs of Safety assessment done. Who does that assessment?

Ms Benham: Our child protection workers.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Does that count in their caseload?

Ms Benham: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Just individual?

Ms Benham: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: If I am a child protection officer and I am carrying 12 cases at any one time, one of those could be just a one-off Signs of Safety assessment?

Ms Benham: Yes; most of our staff who were in our intake and assessment teams doing the safety modelling assessments would carry a much lower number than 12 at any one time. The figure of 12 is generally a caseload of children in care. Our front-line workers who are doing the Signs of Safety assessments as part of the safety modelling assessments would generally have a caseload of less than 12.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Just to go back to my original question: are you telling us that you cannot pull out a record of how many children are being monitored by your child protection officers who are not in care?

Ms Benham: We can give you caseloads on average of what is happening for children who are not in care, but I cannot give you —

Hon HELEN MORTON: Can I add to this? I do not know whether I will make it easier, but the monitoring is done through a variety of different programs. If it is a family support program, they are engaged in family support, but because they are engaged in family support the family is being monitored through that process.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Are they not child protection officers?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Not necessarily; family support services could be provided by a not-for-profit organisation.

Ms Benham: Very much so, and typically will be. We have intensive family support services and other family support services that are provided, so we would link the family to those services and they will get on and support improved parenting or whatever the issues are without the need for a child protection worker to be involved. They will re-refer if there are safety concerns.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I just have one more question to ask on this subject. The children in care, of course, might be assigned to caseworker, but some of them are monitored, so they are not active cases; is that a fair description?

Ms Benham: They are cases that are generally very stable and they are actively monitored by a team leader. They are regularly reviewed. Tasks are undertaken, but they are not allocated a caseworker. To give you an example, very typically, it might be a case of children having been placed with a grandmother or some other family relative and we are seeking a special guardianship order through the Children's Court for that grandparent to assume parental responsibility for that child. That is a typical case.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Do you have an age breakdown of those unassigned or monitored cases?

Ms Benham: We have a breakdown in terms of guidelines around age ranges of children. For example, children under the age of two are not to be put onto the monitored list and children between the ages of three and five, where there are safety concerns, cannot be put onto the monitored list. For other children in that age group there needs to be a sign-off approval by the relevant executive director, and that is then reviewed. The approval by the executive director has to be reviewed regularly.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: How often?

Ms Benham: Every three months by an executive director. That is just the approval for them to stay on.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So it pops up every three months?

Ms Benham: Only for the approval, but the cases are regularly monitored by the team leader. So there is a very active process around reviewing what is happening for the children.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Would that be a visit by a team leader or a phone call or a check-in with a caseworker? How is it done?

Ms Benham: It depends on the case.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: How many children are being monitored of the 4 000?

Ms Benham: How many on the monitored list? I can give you that data.

The CHAIR: Member, if you could bring your questions to a close and we will move on and hopefully come back to you.

Ms Benham: I will just make a couple of comments in relation to that. For the number of monitored cases, the aim has been 10 per cent of open cases during the past five years. At the end of June we had the lowest number of monitored cases ever in terms of proportion of the total work load, at seven per cent.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is not necessarily a good thing, is it? You have got to seven per cent now, have you not?

Ms Benham: We have got to seven per cent; our target was 10 per cent.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is because the other 93 per cent could not be put on the monitored list.

Ms Benham: No.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: What does that seven per cent equate to in figures?

Ms Benham: The number of children on the monitored list as at 30 June was 451 out of a total of 6 315 open cases, which is seven per cent. I can tell you in comparison to just indicate how it has improved over the last five years. As at 30 June, 28 per cent of the total cases were on the monitored list.

[8.00 pm]

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is 30 June 2008.

Ms Benham: Sorry, 2008.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Okay. Can you give us a breakdown of the ages—take a date; pick a date—today of those 451? Can you give us an age breakdown and also —

Ms Benham: We can certainly seek to do that. I can do it by district; I cannot do it by age of children here today —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: No, no.

The CHAIR: Maybe we will take that as —

Ms Benham: — other than what I told you about the restrictions in terms of the age of the children —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is right, yes. So there will be no-one under two.

Ms Benham: — and that is because of their vulnerability.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes. So it is the age breakdown and the number of Aboriginal children of each age—age and Aboriginality.

Ms Benham: On the monitored list.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes.

The CHAIR: Okay. We are comfortable that now everyone understands.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No C5.*]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: There is just one quickly on that point that Hon Sally Talbot had, and then we can move on; we will not go back to it.

The CHAIR: All right.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In terms of the rate of Aboriginal children coming into the care of the CEO, in terms of percentage, how much higher is that than for non-Aboriginal children? Do you have a percentage figure for us?

Ms Benham: Yes. Sadly, the number of Aboriginal children coming into care is increasing compared to the number of non-Aboriginal children. As at 30 June, the rate of Aboriginal children in provisional protection and care—so that is when they first come into care pending a final protection order being made by the court; so that is that period—increased by 30 per cent for Aboriginal children, and there was a decrease for non-Aboriginal children down to 16 per cent, so you can see the inversion.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Hon Peter Katsambanis. Thank you for your patience.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: That is fine. It is what we are here for. I am going to ask some questions firstly around this same area that we have been discussing. I noticed earlier you said that you have lots and lots and lots of data. I guess I will probably be asking for a fair bit of data, and some of it might sound like simple stuff to you, but I am not only new to the committee, but new to the Parliament, and I am trying to bring myself up to speed with what these figures that we are presented with mean. I will stick to that 4 000 number. Rather than say around 4 000 or almost 4 000, I will just say 4 000. Does that number of 4 000 include those children who are in foster care placement?

Ms Benham: Yes.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: It does. How many children are there in foster care placement with foster care families?

Hon HELEN MORTON: While that figure is being looked for, I just wanted to clarify the question about those children in foster care. Is foster care formalised foster care? There are a lot of people who undertake informal arrangements with family members in foster care that are not in that 4 000; so these are children in the care of the CEO that are in foster care.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Yes. My question relates to those children who fall into that category of being formally in the care of the CEO.

Ms Benham: Yes, I can give you that. We actually break this up into Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal as well. These are the living arrangements for those children who are in the CEO's care. As at June 2013, 296 were living with a parent or a former guardian. They are typically children where they have been in foster care, we do the work, using signs of safety around reunification, and they move back to their parents, but an order still exists. So it is that transitional period. In relative foster care—this is children who are living with a relative of some kind, so in their kinship network—there were 1 612 of those, so a bit under half. In general foster care—this is departmental general foster care—there were 1 089. In funded service foster care—so non-government sector foster care—there were 381. In departmental residential care—that is either the family group homes, the residential group homes or the secure care—there were 110. In the funded service residential—so most of our family group homes; most of them are in the non-government sector—there are 269 children placed in those placements. We have 10 children in independent living; we have 14 in prospective adoptive placements, because those children are also in the CEOs care; and we have 168 in what we call unendorsed arrangements—that can be a range of things.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Okay. In the budget papers—budget paper No 2, page 565—it indicates that the cost per day per child of a child in the CEOs care is about \$190 a day, which equates to around \$70 000 a year per child. Do you have those costs per child broken down by the categories you just provided to me? I do not expect you to have them right here right now, but would you be able to provide them?

Ms Benham: It would be incredibly difficult to do that. An inordinate amount of time would be spent. We can certainly do it by categories, as we have just tried to highlight.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Or by category, yes. It might not be per child but by category. What I am trying to get at here—I will be really open about it—it is quite clear that there are some types of care that may be just as appropriate and cost significantly less than other types of care, and I will get to my questions around encouraging more people to be foster carers, as I have noticed that you have as one of the significant issues impacting the agency. What I want to do is put a quantum around that to see what sort of savings could be generated to the system for possible reapplication if we could encourage more people to be foster carers. That is where I am coming from in seeking this information. I do not expect you to go off and do 10 days of work to crunch it, but if you can provide me some more broken down metrics around that, I would appreciate it.

Ms Benham: What I can say, through the minister, is that wherever possible, for a range of reasons not only related to finances, but certainly economics are a factor, we would prefer to have children and young people in foster placements, because it is better for children and young people to grow up in families. Whether that is relative foster care, which is our first option, we will always try and place a child within their family network with what we call volunteer foster carers—always—and that is the least expensive model of out-of-home care. But it is better for the children; that is why we do it.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I tried to be non-pejorative previously, but I agree with your general point. There are always going to be exceptions, but generally I agree that the best type of placement is a placement within a family environment; there is no doubt about that.

Ms Benham: Indeed.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I will ask my question another way then. How many children would you currently have in your system that you believe are appropriate for placement in that family-type environment where no available place exists?

Ms Benham: That is a tough question—a very tough question. We would certainly love to have more foster carers; there is no doubt about that. It is increasingly difficult to recruit foster carers because of lifestyle—because of the way society is these days. Both parents work. We do not typically have one parent at home. There are a whole range of reasons why we find it more and more difficult to recruit carers. Having said that, we do put in a lot of effort, and you will have seen the recruitment campaign in the significant issue that you are talking about there in terms of our ongoing strategy to try and recruit.

[8.10 pm]

We could not quantify that if we had another 200 carers, would we have 200 children and young people fewer in the non-government and/or our residential care setting. We cannot do that breakdown. It is just impossible to do; there is no way of gathering that data. I can only answer your question in terms of a general response, that certainly if we had more foster carers we may see a reduction in the number that were in, for example, family group homes; however, I doubt it. I think what we would probably have is perhaps a bit better opportunity to match carers with particular children, because you will see that we have to have some capacity with our foster carers. Not every one of our foster carers have children placed with them, but it is a question of matching.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Sure.

Ms Benham: Whether it is location or the school they go to, as well as their general needs and will they fit. Would you put another two-year-old with someone who had two-year-old twins as a carer? Perhaps not. There is a whole range of factors that really bind to that. I certainly do not think I would be able to quantify in any real way the difference between how many fewer children, if any, would be in alternative types of care if we had more carers.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I understand that. But the information on, again, page 563 of the *Budget Statements* clearly reads that 100 additional carers were recruited between September 2012 and June 2013. Quite evidently, you had no problem in matching available people to be fostered with these additional carers?

Ms Benham: That 100-odd—there is a bit more than that now—we recruit them into a general pool, so we do not recruit them for a particular child.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Sure; I understand that.

Ms Benham: We recruit them into a general pool, and then we match children to them.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: But they are a welcome addition to the pool.

Ms Benham: They are a very welcome addition, and anything we can do to recruit more, we would.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: How many more would you welcome?

Ms Benham: Oh, I do not know. Gee, I do not know. Lots, if we could get them.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: One hundred, 500?

Ms Benham: Look, there is a limit in terms of how many we can support, and obviously we would not want to have a large number of children sitting there without carers. They all take training and resources to continue to support them and continue to develop them. I do not think it would be open-ended, but we would certainly like a few hundred more. The other thing about it is our last campaign was quite successful in terms of metro-based; it is more difficult in the regions. Also, we would love more Aboriginal general carers, but we cannot get them. Most of them are busy looking after their relatives, if they are available to be caring. You can see the figures of our children in relative care; that is because, proportionately, the Aboriginal people are taking care of their own children.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I would imagine the category the minister mentioned that is not included in statistics, relating to those people who have informal care arrangements, would be a significant number in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

Ms Benham: Huge numbers.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I appreciate that. Okay, we will move on.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Chair, on that point.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Yes, go ahead.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I just have a question about how many of the 4 000 children in care are with relative carers. Do you have a figure for that?

Ms Benham: Yes, I do. The total at the end of June was 1 612.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In terms of the 1 960 Aboriginal children in the care of the CEO, do you have a figure as to how many of those are with relative carers?

Ms Benham: Yes, I do. As at June 2013, 891 Aboriginal children were in relative care.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Okay; great.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I have one more question on statistics. Page 565 of the budget papers indicate that children in CEO's care are not only expensive, but also labour intensive. There is a ratio of one full-time equivalent for fewer than four children in care. Based on these figures, there are 4 000 children and 1 085 FTE allocated to this particular service area. Again, are you able to break the FTE figures down? I notice you look a bit —

Ms Benham: They are not all caseworkers. What we do —

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I realise they are not all caseworkers, but you have allocated, in your own budget papers, 1 085 people to this area.

Ms Benham: Yes; to this service.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: To this service area. I realise that it can never be a perfect match. There might be some people who are allocated to it who might be doing only 0.3 of time there and 0.2 somewhere else and 0.19 somewhere else —

Ms Benham: Corporate, HR.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Hon Peter Katsambanis, it is actually the way all FTE across the entire agency are allocated to these areas. So, for example, a proportion of those people relate to corporate services and finance and all sorts of people. So it is an allocation of FTE across the entire agency.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I realise that; they are not all caseworkers. But, effectively, someone has determined that that is around about the right fit. I am not here to debate it; I am not

even here to say that that is the wrong number or too high a number or too low a number. But what I would be interested in is if there is a further breakdown that approximates to those categories of children in care that you have just given us in relation to relative care, non-relative foster care, group homes et cetera. I recognise, and you mentioned it earlier tonight, that some require far more intensive care than others—I appreciate that. I am just trying to get my head around whether it is broken down into subsets, or if that is not possible to be provided.

Ms Benham: In terms of the way we allocate the FTE, no.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Okay. In terms of, say, caseworkers involved in each of those areas, or would they cross?

Ms Benham: No, we do have caseworkers allocated to care-for-children teams, for example, and we have caseworkers allocated to intake and assessments teams who do the initial assessments. We have other workers who are involved in doing family support work, the parent support work and so on as part of service 3. So we do have a sub-breakdown of those caseworker worker numbers, but it does not —

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Are you able to provide that to us?

Ms Benham: I do not think we have them in here now. We would be able to get you them.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I realise you do not have them now; I am not asking for you to table them now, but as supplementary information.

[Supplementary Information No C6.]

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I am just going to try, for a second, to move off this particular area.

The CHAIR: I assure Hon Stephen Dawson that he is on the list.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I will move off this particular area and into the area of family and domestic violence. I appreciate that this is something that is not the sole responsibility of your agency, but you have quite an involvement. The third last dot point on page 563 talks about over 80 per cent of the 45 000 reported cases in 2012 involving children, and then implementation of the new service model commencing in February 2013 is mentioned. It is stated that that will lead to better integration et cetera of the services provided by your agency and other agencies. Can you outline what that new service model is; why a new service model was required; and what sort of gains you are looking to obtain from this new service model that were not apparent in the previous service model?

[8.20 pm]

Hon HELEN MORTON: Can I say some words about this to start with? This new service model started in 2013 and it was actually rolled out across the state in 2013, but it is the partnership that is undertaken between the Department for Child Protection and Family Support and the WA Police and it is co-locating people so that they can actually respond, and it is also with the not-for-profit sector. The not-for-profit agency can provide support to the agency. So the three agencies are really able to work collaboratively with that family, so it involves the police, Department for Child Protection and Family Support and the not-for-profit agency that might be involved in providing ongoing support. Quite frequently the families would prefer to have this ongoing support provided by a not-for-profit provider. They are concerned, obviously, about the police on an ongoing basis with their family, but they are also concerned about the Department for Child Protection with their family. They feel safer and better supported and are better able to interact with a non-government organisation that will provide that ongoing support to them. Do you want to add anything?

Ms Benham: Not much. That is pretty good. Look, the key point in terms of the difference in the model, because the police and the Department for Child Protection and Family Support have been

co-located for a number of years, as you are probably aware. The key difference is bringing the non-government agency partner into that model. In particular what is happening is that the police incident reports come into that trio of agencies and they triage and assess. They are assessing together and that means that the appropriate response, right at that first point, can be made. Those that need to come to the department do and we respond—the police likewise. A significant proportion can get channelled through to the specialist non-government domestic violence service provider. They can do joint visits together. It can be a range of responses, but we are seeing some very good results out of that model.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I appreciate, of course, that the initial incident response may not necessarily be a response that indicates domestic violence or family violence or any of that, and it then devolves down the line. I appreciate that. It is a 24/7 thing, particularly for the police. The services that are provided through the department either by the department or by the not-for-profits—is there a 24/7 availability of those services or are they limited to particular operating hours, not all the services, but the immediate response services?

Ms Benham: With all of this the police are the immediate response. This is a service in response to the immediate callout from the police. All the callouts from the police get channelled through this service the next day. When necessary when the police go out overnight to one of these incidents, if they need support they call Crisis Care, which is our 24/7 service. That is the backup. Crisis Care will provide whatever response that is required until this team can pick it up the next day.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I will hand over to other members now because I know they are keen to ask questions.

The CHAIR: Do any of the other committee members want to ask questions? Hon Stephen Dawson.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thank you for the opportunity. I had another question relating to foster carers. We moved on quicker than I anticipated. Page 563, essentially. You mentioned that recruiting general foster carers continues to be a priority. In relation to that last round of advertising you did, we got 100 foster carers out of it. How many applications did you have? How many people were knocked back and what process do you go through in assessing foster carers? It is not meant to be a dorothea—kind of short and sharp would be great, minister, because I have got a range of questions, but I am just keen to understand.

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is a good news story but rather than me getting to it, I will allow Kay to speak to it.

Ms Benham: This is current as at 10 September, so it is pretty current. We started the recruitment campaign on 19 September 2012, so nearly a year. We had 1 124 people contacting the department requesting information about becoming a carer. This is like a funnel. Of those, 230 came from the Facebook page and 54 information sessions have been held across the metropolitan area during that period with 504 people. Again, we have to be careful with data. That extrapolates to 230 potential households because clearly some of them are mum and dad. Two hundred and thirty-four actual applications have been received, and just to give you an idea, that compared with 57 in the same time period, so you can see the effectiveness of the recruitment campaign. One hundred and twenty-nine household applications have been approved since the start of the campaign. We are quite encouraged by that. That will be ongoing because people tend to —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am aware that there is a need for foster carers certainly in the Kimberley, but in places like Mirrabooka and Armadale has the department kind of targeted—how are you going about targeting those areas to get those people that are needed?

Ms Benham: As I said before, most of these have come from the metropolitan area and where we have not had such good response, and it is for various reasons, is in regional areas. They have come from a variety of areas across the metropolitan area and will continue to. In addition to this

recruitment campaign, which was a special concerted TV ad campaign, Facebook and so on, each of the districts receive a sum of money to do their own local recruitment as well, because local acknowledge and local differences in the way people might approach the task can vary and can be very effective as well.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Do you have a sense of how many additional carers would be needed in somewhere like the Kimberley?

Ms Benham: The short answer is no, except we need more. Out of the demand funding we have allocated money for 35 general community sector foster care placements to meet some of the demand. Particularly, it is the Kimberley, the goldfields and the Murchison, I believe. I know Kimberley and goldfields. I think Murchison is the other one.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: By way of supplementary information on that issue, can you give me the breakdown of where those 35 are likely to go, plus where the 10 in the metro area are likely to go, if you can do it by DCP district?

Ms Benham: I think the 10 in the metro area have not been determined yet. The other 35 are out to tender and it would really depend on which agencies put their hand up to have those placements. These are all out to the sector. We will have a range of agencies saying, “Here is an our price to provide this many —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It could well happen that the Kimberley ends up with none of these.

Ms Benham: I would be surprised if that happens. We have targeted the Kimberley, the goldfields and the Murchison for these placements and we do know that agencies such as, for instance, Key Assets, perhaps, who already have a presence in these areas, will put up their hands to take these.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Life without Barriers is up there and they are very active in the Kimberley as well.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will keep moving. Page 565 again—it is dealing with FTEs. How many vacant positions exist in DCP offices in the Pilbara, Kimberley, Gascoyne and Murchison regions? If I can have it as at 1 September, I am happy to take that by supplementary information.

Ms Benham: We may have it. We do not have 1 September, but we have the end of June.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am keen to have it kind of recent. I said 1 September because it was three weeks ago and I thought maybe you might be able to get that more easily.

Ms Benham: End of June, I think, we could give you now.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: If I could have that by way of supplementary information—that is, vacancies in the Pilbara, Kimberly, Gascoyne, Murchison and goldfields as of 1 September.

[Supplementary Information No C7.]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Further to page 565 and FTEs, can I ask how many Aboriginal staff you have working in the agency, where they are located and their positions? So, again, you may be able to give me the figure of how many you have working in the agency but you may not be able to give me their locations and positions this evening.

[8.30 pm]

Ms Benham: We can get it for you. We will provide it as supplementary information.

[Supplementary Information No C8.]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I refer to the item “Working with Children Checks—Activity and Fee Increase” on page 562. I am keen to get a sense of how many applications the department gets monthly for working with children check applications. What is the average process and time?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Can you say again what you specifically want?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: How many applications do you get monthly; what is the average processing time and what is the longest processing time?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I can talk about lots of things but I cannot answer those questions.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sorry.

Ms Benham: Since 2006 we have had 106 000 applications.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Can you give me the figures for 2012–13?

Ms Benham: It is point-of-time data, but we had 5 100 applications in process as at 30 June 2013.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Can you tell me what the average time is?

Ms Benham: It varies. I am going a bit off the top of my head here. Standard checks can be done within a few weeks. When the initial screening shows up charges or some other information of concern, or sometimes when there are multiple names that are very close and we have to be careful checking them, they can take longer, but on average it is a few weeks.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I would not mind getting specific information. Can I have that by supplementary?

Ms Benham: Yes.

[Supplementary Information No C9.]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will try to ask the minister a couple of questions so that she does not feel left out!

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is all right; I am enjoying listening.

The CHAIR: We often find ministers learn a lot at estimates.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I refer to the asset investment program on page 567. This might seem like a dorothy, but it is not. It refers to the construction of residential care facilities in Kununurra, Wyndham, Newman, Kalgoorlie and South Hedland. It states that they are expected to be finalised by September 2013. Has each of them been finalised? Have they been constructed to budget, and if they have not been finalised what is the expected finalisation date?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I was in Kununurra and I opened it.

Ms Benham: You did, indeed.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Were Northam and Geraldton the others?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No; Wyndham, Newman, Kalgoorlie and South Hedland.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I cannot answer about those.

Mr Byrne: Wyndham is expected to be completed by the end of October. Kalgoorlie is expected to be handed over in the next week and Newman is expected within the month of October. All will be completed by 31 October.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: South Hedland?

Mr Byrne: We have purchased a property in South Hedland and it will be ready to move into within the next week or two.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thank you for that. I look forward to some invitations when the minister goes to open them!

The CHAIR: Talk to the neighbours or you might get invited before they turn up!

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: A very important issue!

I move on to, I guess, a more serious issue, which relates to allegations of abuse of children in the care of the CEO on page 565. How many allegations of abuse of children in care and protection of the CEO were received in 2012–13?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Nine children.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Is that an increase or decrease from 2011–12?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is lower than the 2011–12 result, which was 16 children.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Does the minister have a breakdown of the type of allegation made—whether it was sexual abuse, physical abuse or emotional abuse?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Three children were due to emotional harm and neglect; four children due to physical harm; two children due to sexual harm.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: How many of the 2012–13 allegations were substantiated?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Those I called out were substantiated.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The nine were substantiated. Can you give me a sense of how many allegations you received that were unsubstantiated?

Ms Benham: I will have to take that on notice.

[Supplementary Information No C10.]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: To bring me up to speed, who is responsible in the department now for investigating these types of allegations?

Ms Benham: Our child protection workers do the safety and wellbeing assessment and we have a duty of care unit, which is involved in that process in assessing the carers. It is quite a comprehensive process.

The CHAIR: I am happy for you to keep going until you feel you want to let Hon Sally Talbot have a go.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Are you asking me to play fair, Chair? Hon Sally Talbot is welcome to ask a question. There you go; fair is fair.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The onus is on me now. I go back to the issue raised by Hon Peter Katsambanis about domestic violence. I refer to budget papers No 2 and No 3. On page 567 of budget paper No 2, under the heading of “New Works” is the line item “Accommodation—Domestic Violence Accommodation” with an allocation of \$2 million in 2013–14. On page 152 of budget paper No 3 it reads —

A total of \$3.5 million will be spent from 2013–14 to 2016–17 to provide support and outreach services for a new six unit family refuge to be constructed in the metropolitan area.

My first question is: what is the \$2 million for?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The \$2 million is for the new metropolitan refuge. My question to my advisers was: is any of it going towards the Busselton one? But the Busselton one has already been funded.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is it going to the new Perth facility? I thought one of the election promises was to provide additional crisis accommodation to women and children fleeing violence, including \$4 million for two new refuges for larger families in Perth. Is that half the election promise?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is for one facility.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Where is the other facility?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It has not been funded yet.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: When does the minister anticipate funding that one?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It will probably be subject to the next budget round.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The next round?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes. That is my intention. It will be funded during this term of government.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is that part of the \$3.5 million? I gave you an answer there, you see. Budget paper No 3 refers to \$3.5 million being spent, but it refers to only one six-unit family refuge.

[8.40 pm]

Hon HELEN MORTON: That is the recurrent cost to run it.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is the recurrent cost in budget paper No 3? It is \$2 million capital and \$3.5 million recurrent?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will let Peter add more detail.

Mr Byrne: That is correct. That is \$2 million to build the facility and then it will be \$1 million per annum to operate the facility.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: When the government refers to refuges, does it actually say what sort of facility it is? Let me ask: what sort of facility is it? It is a refuge, but what sort of refuge is it?

Hon HELEN MORTON: For women and children.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What I am getting at is one of the recommendations of the Pickett inquiry was specifically for cluster-model accommodation for large families and older boys. Is that what this is?

Hon HELEN MORTON: You are referring to a project that is already funded, which is to be built out at Kenwick. That is already funded, in response to the Pickett recommendations. It is partly funded. It still has to get additional funding.

Ms Benham: It is funded. That is the one that is proposed to be built in Kenwick. What the minister is referring to is an existing facility in Maylands. A new facility is going to be built in Kenwick by the AADS agency, the Aboriginal drug agency. It has the tender for that. That is particularly to support large Aboriginal families—women and their children. It includes young male children up to the age of 18 as well. That is a direct recommendation out of the Pickett inquiry.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: How much were you spending on that?

Ms Benham: Because it is last year's budget, we have not got it.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: There is no expenditure in 2013–14?

Ms Benham: It is recurrent.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: All the capital was in last year's budget?

Ms Benham: There was a meeting last night —

Hon HELEN MORTON: The actual site, interestingly enough, is the site on Wanaping Road. However, there is a requirement, because the Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service Incorporated is working directly with the Department of Housing to acquire the additional funding that is required to actually construct that facility, that is still subject to consideration by Treasury to get that additional funding. They are going to be moving their facility from Mt Lawley out to the Kenwick site, and increasing the number of places that they can use out there.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Was that the acting director general's reference to Maylands?

Ms Benham: Yes.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes. It is moving from Maylands to Kenwick. Currently in Maylands it can accommodate five families. When it moves out to Kenwick, I think it is 10. It will be an increased service.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: This is the one that is on the basis of the recommendation of the Pickett inquiry?

Hon HELEN MORTON: That is correct. It is specifically for Aboriginal women and their children.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: How much has DCP put into it?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The amount that goes to operate the Mt Lawley facility will be transferred. It is the same organisation that will be running it, the Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service Incorporated, but it is subject to additional funding requirements.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: But that is not from your department?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It will be.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Did you not say it was Housing and?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Department of Housing and the Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service are seeking capital funding.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Seeking it from your department?

Hon HELEN MORTON: No. That will be subject to a separate decision.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is the Maylands or Mt Lawley facility still running?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is at the moment.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is it going to be closed? Will there be a hiatus in the service?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It will not stop until this one is open and operational.

The CHAIR: When you say “it will be”, are you saying there is money already in your budget that you can use to do it or are you confident you will get additional funding out of cabinet to fund it?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am confident the additional funding will be available for it.

The CHAIR: Do we know how much additional funding you will need from cabinet?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It will be about \$400 000 additional, over and above what it currently costs.

The CHAIR: Per annum?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Still on the subject of domestic violence: how many programs have we got? I cannot find any reference to this in the budget papers. How many programs do we have for men? We have Breathing Space, which operates in the southern suburbs, which is specifically for men wanting to change violent behaviour. Is that the only service we have running at the moment?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Sorry, I was just reading.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: We have Breathing Space, which is a program specifically for men wanting to change violent behaviour. That is in the southern suburbs. Is that the only service we have at the moment for men’s violence?

Ms Benham: They might have something at the back there for me in terms of services, but Corrections predominantly fund behaviour change programs for men. Some of those are part of the Family Violence Court also; it is funded as part of that program. At various times we have behaviour change programs running in the Kimberley as well as part of the East Kimberley family

violence hub. They wax and wane, but the perpetrator programs are predominantly funded by Corrections. I believe we have some as well, but I will need to get the detail on that. We have family and domestic violence counselling programs but they are not broken down in the detail that we have here.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Will you be able to provide that by way of supplementary information?

Ms Benham: Yes.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Can I be clear: are you asking for residential programs?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: No. Breathing Space is not residential, is it?

Ms Benham: Yes, it is.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is it all residential?

Ms Benham: I think they do outreach as well, but certainly it is a very specialised residential program for men.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That adds weight to my case, does it not, because I was actually in contact with the outreach program? Are there other programs providing that kind of intensive residential help?

Ms Benham: To the best of my knowledge, not residential.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Statewide, that is the only one?

Ms Benham: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Let us go to the non-residential, so just the counselling outreach. Lifeline runs —

Ms Benham: Most perpetrator treatment is done through groups. That is the best practice model. They are quite intensive programs. There are a number of them that run. Communicare run some, and CentreCare. Relationships Australia has quite a big service footprint in this area as well. There are a large number of them. There are some in regional areas as well. But one of the issues with men's treatment programs for family violence is this issue around groups. To get a group of men in the same place at the same time needing a program can be tricky. But certainly predominantly those are funded through the Department of Corrective Services.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Can I just add that it is also part of the residential treatment around drug and alcohol services.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Maybe what we could ask for by way of supplementary information is a list of programs for dealing with men wanting to change violent behaviour which are run through your department.

Ms Benham: The other thing that we do of course offer is the Men's Domestic Violence Helpline.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I was going to ask a question about that.

[8.50 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am just assuming that we can only ask for information from your department. But if there is stuff that you co-fund with Corrections, can we include that as well?

The CHAIR: I would have thought if there is a program and the agency is aware of the total program, particularly if you are the lead agency, I know that you could provide total funding for the program and what is yours and what is other agencies. So, are we clear now about what we are asking for?

[*Supplementary Information No C11.*]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The men's domestic violence helpline, how many calls a year do you get to that?

Ms Benham: I know we can get you that data, it is just whether we have got it for you right now.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I would like some data about both the men's domestic violence helpline and the women's domestic violence helpline. I would like for both services the cost to run, how many calls, have the calls increased and has the funding increased. Would you like me to put that on notice?

Ms Benham: Yes, please. We can certainly get you that data.

[Supplementary Information No C12.]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Just going back to my earlier questions about children in the care of the chief executive officer, can I ask the minister or the director general: in 2012–13, how many children in the care of the CEO died?

Hon HELEN MORTON: One.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Between 1 July 2013 and today, have there been any deaths?

Ms Benham: Both those answers actually I might need to just check. Can I just take that on notice?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure, I am happy to have it by way of supplementary information. Also what I am keen to know is with that child who died in 2012–13, if the department had received information that raised concerns about the wellbeing of the child. If you could clarify that by way of supplementary information as well.

Hon HELEN MORTON: That particular case is subject to an inquiry by the Ombudsman, as you are aware.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I was not.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Okay. Any time there is a death of a child in the care of the CEO, the Ombudsman is required to do a full inquiry into that. That inquiry is taking place at the moment.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will look out for that. By way of supplementary, if you can just provide what information you can. In my day, we had the Child Death Review Committee, so the Ombudsman obviously does that.

Ms Benham: If I can just respond to that, we still do but it is run out of the Ombudsman's office. There is a great deal of sensitivity in terms of information; there are ongoing police inquiries, so we would not be wanting to provide any information about that particular case.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I am not asking about any detail; I am just asking, kind of, when it happened—there was one in 2012–13—and if, essentially, there had been concerns raised with the department. I think you should be able to provide that information.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Some of it is in the public arena already; I am happy to give you that. But I think that anything that is not in the public arena at this stage, on the basis of it going through the inquiry that it is going through, we need to sort of keep that.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am very happy with that, minister. Did you note it by way of supplementary?

The CHAIR: No, I am just waiting until it is clear what is going to be provided. At this stage, what I am hearing is it is really just if there have been any deaths since 1 July.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: And we are just going to clarify that there was actually only one in 2012–13.

The CHAIR: Clarify one in 2012–13 and provide any information that you are comfortable with providing in relation to the issues about the knowledge before the events.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I do not want to —

Ms Benham: It is sensitive.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes, so I do not want to push it. But I am after the information that I can be provided without kind of causing an issue.

The CHAIR: Obviously, you can provide that and you may want to privately brief the member on other matters that are of a more sensitive nature, if that is of assistance as well.

[*Supplementary Information No C13.*]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Just in relation to the Child Death Review Committee, how is that constituted? Is there now a board? Is there a committee of specialists; and, if so, who is on that committee?

Ms Benham: There is a child death review function within the Ombudsman's office. Obviously, the Ombudsman is overseeing it all, but there is a specialist assistant Ombudsman who has the function and then there is a number of investigating officers, all of whom sit within the Ombudsman's office. They undertake their functions under their act and their legislation.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am going to move onto a separate issue that relates to the children in the care of the CEO who had their case management delegated to a not-for-profit provider. Minister, a number of weeks ago you were asked in this place about how many children were in this trial, and I believe you said 19. I just want to get a sense as to where this trial is up to, what agencies are participating in the trial and are any of the agencies Aboriginal service providers? Start off with that, first of all.

Hon HELEN MORTON: When you say up to date, the information is still 19 children. It commenced on 1 July this year; it will conclude on 30 June 2014. The names of the organisations involved are Parkerville Children and Youth Care Inc; Anglicare WA; Mercy Community Services; and Wanslea Family Services Inc. I am aware that there was an Aboriginal organisation that was originally interested and commenced and then determined that it would be—I am understanding what has been told to me by the organisation involved. It actually became too difficult for them to be in that role of a case manager because they were also supporting the family. As the case manager, they were being seen by the family in a different light and they felt that their priority was to be the family support agency. Consequently, they withdrew their offer to be a part of this trial.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Was there a tender process? How did these agencies become involved? Was there a tender?

Ms Benham: No, it is actually a pilot, so the agencies that we fund who do this work have our children in care already; they have obviously already been through a tender process. The additional part for this is that they have the day-to-day decision-making ability for a child. So instead of having to come back to the department, they have got the children in their care and they can make those decisions. That is in effect what it means. In terms of some of the difficulties that can sometimes set up, particularly for an agency like Yorganop, which is a very good excellent service—but things like contact with the birth parent, it can sometimes get quite difficult for them to be able to negotiate what is very difficult in many circumstances. Notwithstanding that the cases that we have included in the pilot are long-term stable children and young people who are on orders to 18, they still have a range of complexities. So they decided to withdraw from the pilot. There is going to be an evaluation of the pilot and we will see where we go from there.

[9.00 pm]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: If the pilot is deemed successful, what is the next step?

Ms Benham: We would look to extend it in line with the overall tenet of trying, where possible, to work in partnership with non-government agencies to the extent that we can.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Internally, have you looked at the number of children that you might seek to include in such a program?

Ms Benham: They are limited by the criteria of being in long-term care to 18 orders. Generally speaking, where children are on time-limited orders, generally for two years, we are looking to reunify them back to their parents. That is where the emphasis is in terms of the casework with that family, and we need to keep those cases. Potentially a large proportion of those who are on long-term to 18 orders could go to the non-government sector if they are willing to take on that role.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In the same general area, I was interested—I did not get to ask it earlier—in the number of family resources employees at the agency have. Can you give me a figure of how many family resources employees you had in 2012–13 and you will have in 2013–14?

Ms Benham: We can get you that data. We do not have that level of detail now.

[Supplementary Information No C14.]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Going back to the last question, in terms of delegation of case management to community sector organisations, is there a cost saving to the agency involved in delegating these cases to the not-for-profit sector?

Ms Benham: No, there is not. We fund the agency on the basis of our caseload, if that makes sense. Nineteen cases, if you like, are out there. We fund the equivalent of the proportion of the caseworker who lines up with the number of children they have.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The money that you get from Treasury per child, do you fund the not-for-profit the same amount?

Ms Benham: Yes, we do. In effect, we try to build that into the funding formula. I mentioned before that we have a figure of about \$5 000 per child who is in care to meet their costs over and above their foster care subsidy, and that goes to the agency as well.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Can I just come back to the domestic violence refuge. It was not clear to me at the end. Is the one that will be funded in Kenwick the only one in these budget papers that is going to be funded?

Hon HELEN MORTON: No, it is the other way around. The one that is funded in these papers is a new one. To the best of my knowledge, the location has not been determined yet. It could be Ellenbrook, but it is not yet determined. The one that you are referring to in Kenwick is already partly funded but needs some top-up funding.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: There is only one in this set of budget papers. You are still scouting for a location for the new one but you are considering the East Metropolitan Region.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I understand that to be the case.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Has there been a tender for the service to provide that?

Ms Benham: Not yet.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Do we have a time line on that?

Ms Benham: Certainly this financial year.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Is that when the tender will be let or just called for because, sadly, there are not that many months left in this year.

Hon HELEN MORTON: This financial year, until June next year.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: By the end of June next year, what will we see on the ground?

Ms Benham: We are a bit dependent on the availability of land, so the Department of Housing is sourcing that. We are a bit in their hands in terms of trying to find a suitable location. Obviously, there are a range of factors around that—safety, and location has to be right. We have to do

consultation with the community and so on. There is a little way to go but we have put some money in a budget, I believe, for operational costs this year, which indicates that we are hoping that the refuge is up and operating by the end of June this year.

The CHAIR: Could I clarify a point? Your operating budget is going from \$500 000, to \$1 million and then \$1 million and the capital side is going to the Department of Housing.

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is in our budget but we asked the Department of Housing to do that for us.

The CHAIR: So the department has the money for the capital in this budget.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Coming back to the current Maylands service, who owns the property in which the Maylands service is currently located? Is it this service, the department or the Department of Housing, and what will become of that property?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I do not know if it is owned by the department, but I think it is. It has been operating for 12 years; I know that much. I am fairly certain that the property is owned by the Indigenous land council

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: So its future as a service will rest with that organisation?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The council is actively involved in transferring its interest to the Kenwick site.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: My interest is in what will happen in Maylands after that.

Hon HELEN MORTON: That is right, and I do not know the answer to that. I understand the Indigenous land council owns that property, but I could be wrong about that.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Can I take that as supplementary information to get clarification on the ownership of that?

Hon HELEN MORTON: That might have to come from the Department of Housing.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Irrespective of that, I am sure the department will know.

The CHAIR: If the minister can provide whatever information she can, and if her agency can source that from the Department of Housing, we will make that C15.

[Supplementary Information No C15.]

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I would like to move back to a topic on page 563, the Signs of Safety model. What was the total budget for the delivery of training in the use of Signs of Safety for 2012–13 and what is the budget for 2013–14?

Ms Benham: The short answer is we probably cannot tell the member or break it down —

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I will take that on notice.

Ms Benham: — maybe not even on notice. We can give data on our training spend at our learning and development centre, but we provide a raft of training in what we call formal learning, so one, two and three-day courses. We provide training for our staff and for other partner agencies as well. That is provided by our staff. We buy in a very small amount of consultancy service from Andrew Turnell, who was the founder of the Signs of Safety model, but we provide the training. We take great pride in our organisation being what we call a learning organisation. That means we see every event as a learning opportunity. I do not say that flippantly. I mean in terms of our learning framework.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I understand the principles behind the training implementation in the department. My particular question is about Signs of Safety, as it is a relatively new program. I understand it only came into effect in the last budget round.

Hon HELEN MORTON: No, it was in 2008.

Ms Benham: It was introduced to the department in 2008, but the program started to be developed in the 1990s.

[9.10 pm]

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Still back on training, just on the Signs of Safety, could you isolate the training costs external to the agency; that is, how much did you pay out to implement training in the assessment program all up?

Ms Benham: It would be a tiny proportion, probably —

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I am interested in over 2012–13 and 2013–14.

Ms Benham: The only external money that we have spent on Signs of Safety training would be the costs associated with Andrew Turnell’s consultancy, and it would literally be just maybe \$200 000 a year. It is a very small amount because we do it ourselves; it is in-house.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: What about the costs of the Signs of Safety gathering in Burswood last year?

Ms Benham: Yes, we can give you that.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: That was last November, was it not?

Ms Benham: Yes.

The CHAIR: Is that supplementary information?

Ms Benham: Yes; I cannot provide it now.

[*Supplementary Information No C16.*]

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I have other questions about how that is evaluated et cetera, but I know that other people have other questions, so I will put that one on notice.

Ms Benham: I can answer it quite easily, though, if you would like, quite quickly.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Yes.

Ms Benham: We are currently in partnership with the University of South Australia, which has the Australian Centre for Child Protection, and we are in a three-year evaluation program with them. We are coming up to the end of our first year, and that is costing us \$150 000 for that evaluation over the three-year period.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I mentioned the working with children check earlier on. I refer to page 562 of budget paper No 2, the line item “Working with Children Checks—Activity and Fee Increase” and the figure of \$780 000 estimated actual for 2012–13. It then goes up to \$892 000 in budget estimate for 2013–14 and up to \$1 063 000 and \$1 062 000 in the forward estimates after that. Can you let me know what that dollar increase is for? Is that the fee increase as it is written there or are we expecting more applications?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is a fee increase for CPI from \$53 to \$54 and from \$10.30 to \$10.50 for volunteers and for replacement working with children cards. It is a small increase and it continues government policy of subsidising the checks that currently cost approximately \$100 each. The acting director general might want to add to that.

Ms Benham: No; only that it is the lowest fee in Australia.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Did that fee increase come in on 1 July?

Ms Benham: Yes.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Can I ask then about adoption fees or the fees that families pay the department to adopt? Can I ask about what they cost and whether there was an increase in fee this year?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is the same thing, but I will just get that information for you. It is a CPI increase.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am happy to hear it.

Ms Benham: Again, it is relatively low compared with other jurisdictions.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Adoption fees have not increased since 2002. I am just looking for the actual fee increase. The adoption education session increased from \$190 to \$194 from 2012–13 to 2013–14; the actual first and subsequent application from \$750 to \$765; the first assessment from \$986 to \$1 006; and the subsequent assessment from \$650 to \$663. In all cases the increase was two per cent.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Further on the issue of adoptions, can you give me a figure for how many adoptions of domestic children occurred in Western Australia last year?

Ms Benham: Yes, but not right now; it is in here somewhere, but it is not a question that we had anticipated.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: So you do not have those figures with you this evening?

Ms Benham: No, but we can get them.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: And also whether that was an increase or a decrease on the previous year.

Ms Benham: Yes.

[Supplementary Information No C17.]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am interested to hear further from the minister about adoptions. Are adoptions in Western Australia still highly sought after? The situation has always been that there are a lot more people seeking to adopt a child in Western Australia than there are children available. Only a handful of children have been available for adoption.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I understand that continues to be the case. The reason so few children are made available for adoption is because parents are reluctant to relinquish their child under almost any circumstance.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Does the department provide families who wish to adopt children from overseas with any assistance, and is the department involved in monitoring that?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Kate can speak to that.

Ms Benham: We do the assessments for both local and overseas adoptions. There is still only a tiny number of overseas adoptions. Generally, overseas countries are restricting even further the number of children who can be adopted outside of their borders.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Does the department do that assessment on behalf of the federal government or does each state do that individually directly to the foreign country?

Ms Benham: This is a bit technical. I can get the member the answers to those questions, and I am happy to give him a briefing if he would like, because it is quite a complex area. There is federal legislation that we are governed by as well, and there is quite a complex web of arrangements, depending on the country. But in all cases we do the assessments, and we then negotiate through commonwealth arrangements.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I would appreciate that briefing. I do not think there is a need for supplementary information on that if the minister is happy for me to get a briefing on the general adoptions issue.

Hon HELEN MORTON: In recognition of how difficult it is to adopt a child within the state, we have put in place the guardianship arrangements. I do not know whether the member is aware of

those. That has taken the place of the desire by some people to adopt a child, because they can take on a guardianship role.

Ms Benham: We have a new program hold Home for Life, whereby if people are looking to adopt a local child or an overseas child, we will fund them in some instances into long-term fostering. That includes, as the minister is referring to, special guardianship orders, and that is where we can through the courts transfer parental responsibility to a carer rather than have the child in long-term foster care.

Hon HELEN MORTON: And rather than have the child adopted.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I would be interested in getting the figures on the number of guardianship orders that have been made.

Ms Benham: I can give you that information now. I have the figures for that. It is a monthly report. I have the figures for Home for Life as well.

[9.20 pm]

With the Home for Life program, as at June 2013, we have 20 approved carers, eight of them have children placed, there are six awaiting placement and there are five on hold for a range of reasons. In terms of SGOs, there are currently 373 children on special guardianship orders. It is quite significant in terms of us very much having a view to trying to have children in permanent care arrangements wherever possible, still in contact with their birth family but in stable normal families.

The CHAIR: Hon Sally Talbot, did you have some questions?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes. Do you want to indicate who else is in the queue?

The CHAIR: I do not think anyone else has indicated.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I can put the rest of mine on notice.

The CHAIR: It looks as though it is just you, so either when you finish or 9.30 pm, whichever comes first, we will be going home!

Hon SALLY TALBOT: No pressure! Everyone is as fresh as a daisy.

I refer to page 562 and the program rationalisation. I am not going to ask you the obvious question because we know the answer. There is \$645 000 in program rationalisation. We know that \$615 000 was the ending of the emergency relief provision. I notice that while you have cancelled emergency relief for unforeseen crises, financial assistance, furniture removal, single-event household disasters, baby formula, optical, health equipment and multi-birth allowance, there is still emergency relief available for a couple of other categories; is that correct?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes, that is correct.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: And they are?

Hon HELEN MORTON: For example, it is available for things like HUGS obviously, but it is also for when children are involved in family and domestic violence, homelessness when children are involved—I thought I had it written down; I read it last night —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Maybe I can help. It is for families with children that are homeless or at risk of homelessness, family violence with assistance to leave, stranded travel —

Hon HELEN MORTON: That is correct.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: — the bereavement assistance program and natural disasters.

Hon HELEN MORTON: That is correct.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Leave HUGS aside. I am talking about cash payments; people used to be able to walk through the doors of a DCP office and walk out with either cash or a food voucher or

some kind of material assistance. How much are you still going to be spending on funding those four or five remaining emergency relief categories?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is \$285 000.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So \$285 000 remains, but \$615 000, I think, is being cut.

Hon HELEN MORTON: That \$285 000 refers to family and domestic violence, homelessness and stranded travel. The bereavement costs are not included in that.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So where do people get bereavement and natural disaster assistance?

Hon HELEN MORTON: That bereavement assistance is about \$700 000 and the brokerage for homelessness is about \$150 000.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is that elsewhere in the budget as separate line items?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes, it is under service 3.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So people can still go into a DCP office and come out with cash or food vouchers. How is that assessment done?

Ms Benham: If you like, the general category of where we are not doing what we were doing before and are referring people on to other services is for those people who come in for unforeseen crises. There is a range of circumstances in which we can refer them on to other services. With these categories we have here, with domestic violence we are clearly a lead agency in terms of providing family domestic violence services and we will continue to assist people experiencing family domestic violence with emergency relief, with accommodation and a range of other things. In terms of homelessness, we will do an assessment of the family situation where there are children involved and we will either provide the service directly ourselves and/or refer them on to others. What is also occurring in the homelessness area, which is critical—it is in last year's funding, I believe, so it has gone in as new spending in the current budget papers—is a tender for the new homelessness assessment referral service. This is in recognition of the relatively high numbers of people who come into our district offices seeking homelessness support. So, instead of each office individually trying to do whatever they can to cobble something together, the idea is that a non-government service will be established that will have all of the information from across the metropolitan area—we are talking metropolitan area here—and it will be able to much more efficiently and seamlessly refer people to services to meet their needs for accommodation, including those who come in through housing as well. In addition to the \$600 000 for the operations of that service, there is \$150 000, which the minister referred to, for the service provider to be able to sort out short-term accommodation for people when need be.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is this specifically for homelessness?

Ms Benham: It is specifically for homelessness. When other people come into our offices and they are concerned about not being able to feed their children, we will still assess, as we always have, and we will provide support and if necessary will open the case and make sure that they are properly supported.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Do you have a breakdown, minister, in terms of all your regional offices about where the emergency relief was handed out by district office over the last two years, given this is a two-year cutting program—half last year and half this year?

Mr Byrne: We may not be able to provide it with a great deal of accuracy, but we can certainly break it up to the extent possible through our case management system. We are happy to provide that by way of supplementary information.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Could you make it by category as well, so by district office or by category—as broken down as you can give it to us, essentially?

The CHAIR: We will take that as you giving information as broken down into categories as you have available to you.

Mr Byrne: As much as possible; it may be one category over the districts, but we will provide whatever we can.

[*Supplementary Information No C18.*]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The memo that was sent around to the district offices says that district directors are requested to discuss this information personally with resource officers, including how it may impact on their roles and responsibilities. How has it impacted on their roles and responsibilities?

Ms Benham: It varies a bit by district. As we have said previously, this has been a declining area for us and, we would say, rightly so.

[9.30 pm]

People should not need to come to the Department for Child Protection and seek this kind of support. Many of the resource workers have been gradually, over the last number of years, converted into case support-type roles, so instead of giving out just one-off financial assistance, actually assisting caseworkers with cases. They really do a variety of tasks within that, and it really does depend on the needs of the local district. Some of it will be administrative; some of it will be, for instance, assisting with child care and so on for —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is this basically a metro–non-metro distinction or —

Ms Benham: No. It does vary across metro and country in terms of the roles.

The CHAIR: I just had one quick question about—sorry.

Ms Benham: Do you want to add something, Peter?

Mr Byrne: In relation to the resource officer positions, all of those were actually in metro. In a lot of the country districts, they already had been moved to case support roles.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: I just had one quick question for you, minister. I note that you have got a spending change of \$7.5 million for the hardship utility grant scheme. Do you have any money in the out years or the forward estimates at this stage, or is that subject to a further cabinet decision?

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is looked at on an annual basis in terms of the expenditure that has taken place each year. So there is a base level already built into the budget of, I think it is, about \$4 million. This \$7 million is on top of that. It will be reviewed at the end of this year, and whatever we deem is appropriate for the next year will be added on. So it is done on a year-by-year basis.

The CHAIR: Do you know what the average over the last three or four years has been on HUGS expenditure then? I am happy for you to take it on notice?

Hon HELEN MORTON: No, I have got that. I have actually got it. I just have to find it in my file.

Ms Benham: Okay. I have got it. So you want the amount of grants each year.

The CHAIR: The average or the —

Ms Benham: I can give you the exact number. Between June 2012 and June 2013, there were 22 778 grants totalling \$8.02 million. In the year previous to June 2012, there were 18 379 totalling \$6 546 000. To June 2011, in that year there were 12 400 grants totalling \$4.629 million. And in the year to 2010, there were 6 701 grants totalling \$2.268 million.

The CHAIR: So if you have got \$4 million built into your budget, why did you need \$7.5 million if you only paid out —

Ms Benham: They are just grants. Then we have got operating costs and financial counselling. A large proportion of the additional is in financial counselling; a small amount for administrative costs as well.

The CHAIR: Okay. With that, members, I will thank the witnesses and the minister for their attendance. The committee will forward any additional questions it has to you via the minister in writing in the next couple of days, together with a transcript of evidence, which includes the questions you have taken on notice. Responses to these questions will be requested within 10 working days of the 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. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. If members have any unasked questions, I ask them to submit these to the committee clerk at the close of this hearing. On behalf of the committee, I thank you again for your attendance today.

Hearing concluded at 9.34 pm
