

**SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

**ONGOING BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARINGS 2010–11**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
TUESDAY, 20 JULY 2010**

**SESSION TWO**

**Members**

**Hon Philip Gardiner (Chair)  
Hon Liz Behjat  
Hon Ken Travers**

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**Hearing commenced at 12.50 pm**

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

**MURPHY, MR TERRY**  
**Director General, Department for Child Protection,**  
**sworn and examined:**

**LANDER, MS FIONA**  
**Executive Director, Policy and Learning, Department for Child Protection,**  
**sworn and examined:**

**PECKITT, MR JAY**  
**Manager, Management Accounting, Department for Child Protection,**  
**sworn and examined:**

**The CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, welcome. Before we begin, I must administer the oath or affirmation. If you prefer to take the oath, please place your hand on the Bible in front of you.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

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

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you refer to during the course of this hearing for the record; and please also be aware of the microphones and try to talk into them. Ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make a noise near them, and please try to speak in turn. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today’s proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that the uncorrected transcript should not be published or disclosed. This prohibition does not, however, prevent you from discussing your public evidence generally once you leave this hearing. Government agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting Parliament to scrutinise the budget papers on behalf of the people of Western Australia, and this committee values your assistance. Members will greatly assist Hansard if, when referring to the *Budget Statements* volumes or the consolidated fund estimates, they please give the page number, item, program, amount and so on in preface to their questions.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** At page 707 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, the final one there reads —

The Department faces and anticipates continuing challenges in the attraction and retention of staff, particularly in regional remote Western Australia. Substantial and innovative work is being undertaken to ensure the Department continues to attract and retain qualified and suitably experienced staff.

I am just wanting to know perhaps if you could, minister—it might be through the DG—give me some indication of in these areas are we attracting and retaining staff of an Aboriginal Indigenous background? Also perhaps people from the CALD backgrounds as well, because I know the growing number of migrants we have going out into rural and regional Australia. What is happening as far as staffing on the ground in these areas is concerned?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** About 10 per cent of our staff is at present Indigenous. If I can start by saying this: almost 50 per cent of the department's clients are Aboriginal.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Fifty?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, and nearly 10 per cent of the current department's workforce is Aboriginal. The department acknowledges the need to attract and retain Aboriginal staff to better reflect its client base and to ensure that the services provided are very responsive to those needs. The Aboriginal employment and learning strategy was launched in 2009 to build Aboriginal staff representation to more closely reflect that client base. This strategy has an ambitious aim to achieve 20 per cent of Aboriginal employment by 2014. Districts with high Aboriginal client rates, such as those that represent some of the remote country areas, have higher Aboriginal representation targets. For example, both the East and West Kimberley have a 50 per cent Aboriginal representation target by 2014. And as at the end of March 2010 the East Kimberley had 35.7 per cent and West Kimberley had a 40.6 per cent Aboriginal staffing complement. We are striving to get better and these results show that we are. Both those districts are well on their way to achieving that 50 per cent target. To ensure that business area and directorates achieve the Aboriginal staffing targets set by 2014, specific activities to assist in attracting and retaining Aboriginal workers across the department are being implemented. This includes flexible recruitment practices using a range of entry points, supporting performance and development, and providing pathways to qualifications and expanding roles. And the strategy also includes directions for Aboriginal cultural learning that aims to develop relevant knowledge and support for better engagement with Aboriginal families. I do not think that has happened before. That is the target that we are really going out to achieve.

**LIZ BEHJAT:** And people from a CALD background as well; are we looking at strategies there?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes. When I went to the Mirrabooka office not that long ago, we had a number of African workers there, because Mirrabooka has a high population of African people. So, we do look at that when we employ staff.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Because I think that is a little bit of a sort of sleeping giant at the moment because I see it every day where my office is located in relation to issues that are coming forward now with the non-English speaking background people from the African countries in particular but also the Middle Eastern countries as well. And the cultural differences that surround that are very similar to Aboriginal needs as well.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, the department is very aware of those different cultural needs and the clashing of cultures.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I will start with page 705 and your total appropriations. I note there is an increase there of around \$43 million and I was just wondering if the minister could indicate to us how much of that is new money and how much of it is money that was previously allocated to respond to the Ford review?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The increase of \$43.509 is due mainly to the following: \$16.24 million for reform and expansion of residential care services; \$11.3 million, tier 1; \$2.3 million, tier 2; and \$2.644 million for secure care. If I can explain to you, tier 1 is our foster care. So children who are taken into care through no fault of their own go into foster care. Some of our children go to non-government organisations, such as Parkerville, Uniting Care West and Mercy Care; tier 2 is for our children with more challenging behaviours who are put in a home-like environment with 24-hour carers; and tier 3 is our secure care. There is \$13 million for additional

funding for demand; that is, our demand funding. That is for the pressures of the 3 330 children that we do have in care. There is \$4.54 million from the national partnerships on homelessness. If you remember, the state government put in \$68 million and the federal government put in \$67 million, but the breakdown of the \$4.54 million is \$0.524 million for the state and \$4.017 million for the commonwealth. There is \$7.266 million indexation funding to cover salaries, non-government funding and materials; \$4.252 million for HUGS-increased funding for the tariff increases and financial counselling, which included an additional grant of \$2.2 million from the Office of Energy. There is a \$3.766 million increase in depreciation, mainly residential care facilities; a \$2.949 million increase in expense capital, residential care and IT; a \$2.778 million expansion of the responsible parenting services to regional locations under royalties for regions, Murchison and Great Southern; and a \$2.6 million increase for foster care subsidy increases, which are to be increased \$20 a fortnight.

**The CHAIR:** So that totals up to the 43?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is a bit higher because there are four figures that come off, but I will hand it over to Jay to explain those.

[1.02 pm]

**The CHAIR:** Could you repeat the question?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am happy to hear the answer, and then I will re-ask the question if necessary.

**Mr Peckitt:** There are four items that come off because they were only fixed-term funding. The \$7 million was a one-off for fee-for-service placements.

**The CHAIR:** Could you say that again, and speak up a little?

**Mr Peckitt:** Four items come off that received one-off funding in the year. We have \$7 million for fee-for-service placements; \$2.248 million for emergency management services; \$1.534 million for voluntary severances in that year, and \$690 000 for working with children IT system.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is all new money, except that the \$11.3 million was previously announced for reform and expansion of residential care services.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So only \$11.4 million is new money and none of that \$43 million is the money that was allocated in previous budgets —

**The CHAIR:** I think the minister said it is the other way around, and \$11 million, I think, was the only pre-announced money. Is that correct, minister?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** There is \$16.24 million for reform and expansion of residential care services of which \$11.3 million was tier 1, \$2.3 million for tier 2, and \$2.644 million for secure care, which was previously announced, but it is all new money.

**Mr Murphy:** Otherwise new.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Otherwise new money.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Except for the \$11 million?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No.

**Mr Murphy:** The whole \$16 million.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The whole \$16 million was new money. I apologise for leading you up the garden path.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So, none of that other \$43 million is the money that was previously allocated for the Ford review and allocated under the Treasury budget in previous budgets under grant subsidies and transfer payments?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No. I had to fight very hard to get that \$43.509 million. The \$2.6 million increase for foster care subsidy was certainly part of the Ford review.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** What has happened to the \$28.3 million that was allocated to Treasury by the previous government for expenditure in these years, which used to appear under the Treasury line item and now no longer does?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It has all been mainstreamed. Hon Ken Travers, I do not care which government gives the money for children in care. It is a good thing that \$43.509 million of new money was given and the \$28 million that your government put in—if that is what you are asking—was well necessary.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I do not disagree with the minister about more money going into the portfolio. I am trying to work out, of that increase of \$43 million, how much was money that was previously allocated for the Ford review that was put across into the department's budget and how much of it was new money. My understanding is that at least \$28 million of the money transferred over is actually money that was previously held in the Treasury. And, if not, I want to know what happened to the money that was previously held in Treasury for the operations of the agency.

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

**Mr Murphy:** I am sure our finance help will assist you if I get it wrong, but, essentially, that \$28 million was already in the gross figures of the budget, but then it is also highlighted as held in trust by Treasury. Now, it simply moves into the mainstream budget.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Yes, which means that the increase this year in actual new money is \$15 million, not \$43 million.

**Mr Murphy:** No. It had already increased from the base, including that \$28 million.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** You are saying that \$28 million has gone into your budget and then you have had another increase of \$43 million on top of that.

**Mr Murphy:** And, if I am correct, that \$28 million was already reflected in the budget figures—in that base.

**Mr Peckitt:** We already had the \$14.2 million in the 2009–10 financial year and that increased to \$28.3 million in 2010–11, so the amount that relates to that is a \$14 million increase between the two years. Of the amount of \$43 million, \$14 million related to that provisional amount of funding, where the remainder is new funding.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is not what the Treasurer said. Could you check, because it is important that we get this clear? In last year's budget money was held under the Treasury budget subject to your presenting a business case to deal with the Ford review. My reading of the budget now is that that money has been put across into your budget and that makes up a part of that overall increase in your allocations by \$43 million this year compared with last year.

**Mr Peckitt:** It does, but the original \$14.2 million was already allocated in 2009–10 and was included as part of our total cost of services in our budget papers in the previous year. The increase went from \$14.2 million last year to \$28.3 million in 2010–11. That represents a \$14 million increase between the two years, and that is the amount that is reflected as part of the \$43 million increase in 2010–11. That was mainly for the reform of residential care.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Are you saying that the \$14.2 million that is listed on page 122 of the budget papers under Treasury and Finance as expenditure in 2009–10 is actually expenditure that you incurred as the department, and it is also reflected in your budget papers?

**Mr Peckitt:** That is correct, yes. It shows —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** It is shown twice in the budget as an actual expenditure?

**Mr Peckitt:** Yes. It is shown as revenue in our income statement, but not as appropriation that shown coming from Treasury.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So it is shown as revenue, but not as appropriation?

**Mr Peckitt:** That is correct.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** This year your appropriation has gone up by \$28 million —

**Mr Peckitt:** That is correct.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** — because that money that was previously held by Treasury has now been put into your budget —

**Mr Peckitt:** Yes, that is correct.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** — which means that there is only \$15 million worth of new money in the budget.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No.

**Mr Peckitt:** The \$43 million we are referring to relates to the total budget for the department; it was not just appropriation; it is therefore not included in that figure. The comparison is between the 2009–10 total budget and the 2010–11 total budget. We are not just looking at appropriation; we are looking at the budget as a whole.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** The total cost of services?

**Mr Peckitt:** Yes, that is right.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Anyway, we will move on. I have a new area.

**The CHAIR:** Is there anyone else on this micro-financial area, if you like?

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** I cannot say I followed that very well, and I do not claim to be an expert.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** The budget papers are not intended to be followed easily!

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** Am I correct in summarising that \$28 million has somehow come across, but has gone somewhere else and is not going to be called part of the new \$43 million?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Goodness me, I can't follow that one!

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** We have \$28 million coming from somewhere that was already earmarked or quarantined and you are saying that \$43 million is new money, so where is the \$28 million? I still did not entirely follow where that money is.

**Mr Peckitt:** The \$28 million is the total amount allocated in 2010–11 from what was allocated from the Ford review in 2007–08. The \$43 million that we are discussing is the increase between the 2009–10 financial year to the 2010–11 financial year.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** And that \$28 million does not make up any part of that?

**Mr Peckitt:** It makes up \$14 million, because we originally had \$14.2 million in the year —

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** So have we got \$30 million of new money? Would that be a fairer figure, given that you seem to be saying that \$14.2 million is to be counted, not \$28 million? Out of \$43 million, we have got \$31 million of new money.

**Mr Murphy:** It is very close.

**Mr Peckitt:** It is very close, yes.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** So, we have not got \$43 million of new money —

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** We have in this budget.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** — we have \$29 million or maybe \$30 million of new money?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I would take \$60 million, if I could!

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** We are trying to get you \$60 million, minister. We are trying to get it for you!

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I must say that I am wondering where you are going with this because I do not care whose money it is, as long as it is money in my budget to spend for the children in care. That is the important thing.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Minister, that is fantastic, but I would like to know whether we are getting more money or not.

**The CHAIR:** Hold on, Hon Ken Travers—I will clarify that all the committee is trying to do is to understand and find out the facts; it is as simple as that.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** This will just be a simple yes or no. The new money is \$29 million or \$30 million, yes or no?

**Mr Peckitt:** Yes.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** It is not \$43 million.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** For this budget, it is.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is because —

**Mr Peckitt:** The \$43 million is the total increase —

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is because the total —

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** No, but new money.

**The CHAIR:** Let the panel answer.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** It cannot be \$29 million or \$30 million of new money and \$43 million of new money, so can someone decide and tell me which one it is? I have understood you to say it is \$29 million or \$30 million of new money.

**Mr Murphy:** Like a number of accounting things, it is the perspective from which you view it. For us in the department, we have an additional \$43 million net money to spend; however, some of it was already announced and earmarked for us in Treasury accounts—that being \$14 million—which leaves us around \$30 million of brand new money.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But there was \$28 million allocated under the previous budgets, so what happened to the other \$14 million if only \$14 million has come across for Treasury?

**Mr Peckitt:** The \$14 million was in our budget previously, so \$43 million is only looking at the increase between the year.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That does not make sense because your estimated actual and your total cost of services have both gone up by only \$43 million. If you had it allocated as revenue and not as an appropriation, then you would expect your total cost of services to have gone up by a different amount to your appropriations.

**Mr Peckitt:** The amount was included in our total cost of services in both years, just not in our appropriation. Treasury permitted us to include it in our total cost of services showing as revenue from Treasury, but not as appropriation.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Yes, but that should mean that you then get a variation between what your appropriation increase is this year and your total cost of service increase, but they are both going up by around \$42 million to \$44 million. If that is the case —

**Mr Peckitt:** The increase in appropriation is about \$49 million—close to \$50 million in total. There are probably some other plus and minuses that impact on that, but the \$14.2 million was included in

our total cost of services in the 2009–10 year and, therefore, that is why there is only a \$14 million increase into next year for the money that we are talking about—the \$28.3 million.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** It is interesting because the Treasurer has been saying that \$28.3 million was funding for the Ford review —

**Mr Peckitt:** Yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** — and that has been included as part of that \$43 million increase. That is why I am trying to understand.

**Mr Peckitt:** Yes, because the \$28.3 million is the total amount we had allocated in 2010–11 for the provisional money from Treasury brought forward. However, the \$43 million relates only to the increase between the last financial year and this financial year; therefore, the increase between those two years from forward is only \$14 million of that \$43 million.

[1.15 pm]

**The CHAIR:** Can I just see if I can understand the second part? Was there any of the forward money of the \$28 million spent in the 2009–10 year?

**Mr Peckitt:** Yes, \$14.2 million.

**The CHAIR:** So money was spent there and the other was cut by Treasury, which then passed across and came into your budget through a revenue entry in their accounting system.

**Mr Peckitt:** That is correct, yes.

**The CHAIR:** That \$14 million then becomes part of what your total cost is going to be but the appropriation is going to include the previous \$14 million. Is that how it is?

**Mr Peckitt:** Yes. In the 2010–11 year, it will include the full \$28.3 million as an appropriation as compared to revenue previously.

**The CHAIR:** Even though it would appear that half of that forward money was spent in the 2009–10 year? That is what I have misheard.

**Mr Peckitt:** It is a recurrent amount of money. We had \$14.2 million last financial year and we have \$28.3 million in the 2010–11 financial year, and that \$28.3 million will continue on. From 2010–11, that full amount of \$28.3 million will appear as an appropriation for the department, whereas previously it was not an appropriation; it was shown as revenue but it was included in our total cost of services.

**The CHAIR:** Just by way of summary, the reason why these questions are important for all of us is that allegedly there is \$20 million missing somewhere in the health budget. The Under Treasurer knows about the \$20 million missing. He knows they cannot find out where it is. That is the only reason why the clarification is relevant.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** We know where every cent is in this budget—I hope!

**The CHAIR:** That is what worries me, minister. I wish you had not said the last two words!

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will take the last two words off, Hansard!

**The CHAIR:** Hansard is too accurate to take it back.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I just want to now turn to the HUGS program. It appears at page 705. That is the first point. There is no money beyond this financial year. Can the minister explain to us why that is the case?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I think that was explained in estimates, was it not?

**Mr Murphy:** There is additional money for HUGS, as indicated there, provided as a one-off. However, I want to make clear that in the recurrent budget for HUGS, we have the staff complement that actually runs the program and around \$1.5 million in grant funds, and that is



recurrent and built into the budget through the out years. For this year, though, there was an additional one-off allocation in conjunction with increases in utility prices to meet those additional costs of living for people affected. That has been made as a one-off because it really has to be tested how much of that money is accessed because demand for HUGS is affected not only by utility prices, but also by employment rates and all factors that affect the economic wellbeing of the community. It is determined and allocated on an annual basis and we would anticipate that, in the light of what happens this year, that will be reconsidered and reallocated next year and in coming years.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** You said that the grant side of it is within your budget. Can you indicate to us, on page 713 in the “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”, which one of those line items it is included in?

**Mr Murphy:** It is very easily identifiable under “Other”, which is right at the bottom of the page.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Can you give us a breakdown of what that “Other” is made up of?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes. The hardship utility grants for this year is \$2 724 000, the national partnership agreement on homelessness is \$635 000 and other “Other” is \$90 000, which is a small amount of money in conjunction with the responsible parenting program.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Does any of that additional money of the \$5.9 million that has come in this year get included there at all?

**Mr Murphy:** No.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** In the out years, when that “Other” drops to \$2.345 million, how will that then be broken up into the different categories?

**Mr Murphy:** That is where you can see the hardship utility grants base of \$1.585 million, the national partnership agreement on homelessness figure indexed up to \$670 000 and the responsible parenting grant funds of \$90 000 continuing.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Of course we could see it. I do not know how I missed it now that you have pointed it out to me! How much did you say you were spending this year on the HUGS program?

**Mr Murphy:** The total budget —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Not the one-offs.

**Mr Murphy:** It is \$6 115 000.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Can you just go through and re-break that up for us?

**Mr Murphy:** That is just grants funding.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But there is the new category and there is the ongoing category. You went through those figures earlier, and I did not quite get to write them down. I thought you said something like \$2 million for HUGS and you have got \$1.58 million for next year.

**Mr Murphy:** Given that it is a combination of one-off and recurrent, it can get confusing. This year’s budget is \$6 115 000. In answer to your previous question, what continues in the out years there is the \$1 585 000, which is the HUGS allocation made originally in 2008–09. That has then been boosted by an additional allocation of \$839 000 in 2009–10 and in 2010–11, it is \$3 690 600. There is a series of one-offs. The 2009–10 one-off has been repeated this year as a one-off and then the additional one-offs in 2010–11.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So what you are saying is in the out years you will have the 2008–09 allocation for HUGS, you do not have the additional money that was spent in 2009–10 for HUGS, and you do not have the extra \$3.69 million that you have for HUGS for 2010–11.

**Mr Murphy:** Not in 2011–12 because those allocations have been made on a one-off basis but in response to specific utility price increases that are then judged on an annual basis depending on the economic needs of the community.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That might be the case for the ones where you are going forward, but surely you must know whether you need the 2009–10 one because that has passed.

**Mr Murphy:** And that has been allocated in this year's funds again.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But not for future years.

**Mr Murphy:** No. This is a demand-driven program. It is arguable whether they should be put in recurrent funds or allocated on an annual basis. Certainly, as the managers of the program, we are very comfortable considering demand on an annual basis because the economic circumstances of the community change. It is very, very unlikely that the demand for grants will precisely match what has been allocated this year or in any one year.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** From memory, I think we have had just over 9 000 applicants since it started and I think that is at a cost of \$3.12 million. Somebody can shoot me down if that is wrong because I am not reading it from anywhere; it is just going from memory. But I am pretty sure that is correct since it started.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** With HUGS, do you not have to be referred or be facing disconnection? The actual criteria are fairly serious to get you into the HUG scheme, is it not?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** They have to go to a financial counsellor, yes.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** Is it not for people who are facing disconnection or have been identified for some particular reason as at risk? The criteria are not just general hardship; it is quite specific in that way.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Certainly, if people are facing difficulty, we do tell them to ring up the utility as soon as possible and discuss it with the utility. Then they will be referred to a financial counsellor if the utility deems it necessary for them to go there.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** So potentially then the budget for HUGS could be bigger next year than this year? That is an option.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes. It is demand driven, so it could well be.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Because we ran through those figures fairly quickly, I just want to be clear. Of the new \$5.982 million money, how much is actually for the payment of people's bills and how much is for financial counselling services?

**Mr Murphy:** All the moneys I mentioned are for grants for payment of people's bills.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** How much is actually spent on the financial counselling?

**Mr Murphy:** I will have to take some additional advice.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Just while you are doing that, if I could go back to what Hon Linda Savage was saying and give you some more information. The first 10 months of 2009–10 saw increased demand in HUGS grants. During that period, 5 496 grants to the value of \$1.829 million were provided. In comparison with that, 2 687 grants totalling \$864 482 were provided in 2008–09 over a period of 10 months following the commencement of HUGS in August 2008. That demand is certainly a driver.

**Mr Murphy:** The funding that the state allocates for financial counselling is \$7 million in the current budget, and that is separate to all the grants moneys that have previously been outlined.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So all of the money we have talked about until now is purely on grants.

**Mr Murphy:** Yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Financial counselling is \$7 million. Was that the same last year and will it be the same next year? In 2010–11 you have got \$7 million allocated. How much was allocated last financial year?

**Mr Murphy:** I do not have an exact figure, but there has been some increase this year. It is around a \$1 million increase for this year.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Is that carried over into future years as well?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is allocated for future years. Are people still experiencing waiting times before they can get to see a financial counsellor?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It just depends. When I toured around the country areas, country people that work in the financial counselling centres know the people because they are smaller communities and there is not such a long wait. There is a couple of weeks' wait. It can be up to a month waiting time in the city, I have heard, but somebody will need to confirm that for me.

**Mr Murphy:** It varies. I think the important thing is that people can be juggled around any wait lists in terms of the criticality of their need.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Do you, as a department, keep statistics on how long people are having to wait to see a financial counsellor or is that something that the services that you fund are required to report to you on?

**Mr Murphy:** The services keep that information and then will advise us on about a quarterly basis, unless it is critical.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So what is the current wait time that people are experiencing to get to see a financial counsellor?

**Mr Murphy:** As the minister indicated, it varies.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Can you maybe table the last lot of reports of the waiting times?

**Mr Murphy:** The information we receive constantly by being in touch with the agencies is saying it is about two weeks on average, but it can vary at different times.

[1.30 pm]

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Are there any particular areas where it is a bigger problem than in other areas?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Can I just say that in July 2008—under the member's government—it was recognised that financial counselling needed to increase. There was \$15.9 million over four years to deliver the services and the new hardship utilities grant scheme. As a result of that, the financial counselling services funding increased from an average of \$69 000 to full-time equivalent financial counselling services, with the metropolitan area increasing to \$95 000 per annum, regional areas increasing to \$100 000 per annum, and remote areas increased to \$210 000 per annum, and what we did in 2009–10, the department received an additional \$460 600 for 4.5 full-time equivalent financial counselling positions in Fitzroy Crossing, Merredin, Moora, Bunbury, Mandurah and Armadale–Byford, so we realise that there is pressure out there for financial counsellors and that that pressure is increasing.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is right; it is increasing as power bills are increasing.

**Mr Murphy:** If I may add, an important one for the HUGS program, recognising that waiting lists can occur at times, is setting up a hotline for HUGS applications through the Financial Counsellors' Association of WA, with a round \$100 000 allocation to that. That means that if somebody is at risk of disconnection, they can access a HUGS grant very rapidly.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** My question was whether are there particular areas that are facing difficulties at the moment with respect to accessing financial counsellors.

**Mr Murphy:** We do not think so, but it will rise and fall. The minister indicated where new allocations have been made in the past year. We made new allocations this year on the basis that they were receiving more demand than elsewhere and that has been in the City of Stirling, the City of Wanneroo, the Salvation Army in Balga and in the Midland area. Additionally, the Port Kennedy and Rockingham areas have been subject to some greater demand, and Anglicare has been funded out of there. The City of Cockburn has been experiencing some additional demand, and positions are being funded at Atwell and Coolbellup. We keep a pretty close monitor, and as I said, the hotline really has the capacity to pick up some slack.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Now that we have moved on to statistics, do you keep statistics on the demographics of the people that are seeking assistance—what post codes, what age, whether they have dependent children, whether they are working or not working? Are those stats kept by the department? Do you want to table them or take it as a question of notice to provide that information at a later stage? The shuffling of papers suggests to me that it may be that you have them there ready for us!

**Mr Murphy:** I do not think we have brought our contracts for financial counselling services, but I think all those the member has mentioned are collected. It is also a matter of balance between collecting lots of detailed information from a non-government service, and that which assists us. Essentially, it is around income, employment, family status, children and then, for our own service planning services, whether Aboriginal or CALD.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I would like to have those stats tabled, if we could. If we have them here, we could table them now; otherwise we could take them on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Are those the complete stats for what has been asked?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes, it think it would be neater if it was taken on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Okay; thank you very much.

*[Supplementary Information No BI.]*

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** We do not need them to be neat, if the stats are all there.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** They need to be in a better format, Hon Ken Travers.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** If you have got them there, I do not want to create any extra work for the department. If you have got them there, I am happy with the way, in the form in which you have got them.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I think the member heard my response.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I just do not want to create extra work for the department.

Given HUGS was designed to assist in one-off unplanned financial emergencies, or for those chronically unable to manage their finances, what work is the department doing to develop new ways of assisting people who simply cannot afford the significant increases that we have seen for electricity, gas and water?

**Mr Murphy:** It is difficult to draw limits around that question. We think that the HUGS scheme is well targeted and is sufficiently resourced. It has the financial counsellor back-up that is a necessary part of helping those people who get into that sort of strife. In addition, the department, but together with a number of non-government agencies through commonwealth funding, provides other sorts of financial assistance. That also has the linkage to financial counsellors if needs be. There will always be families who are struggling, or so it would seem. When we move beyond the very targeted financial assistance and financial counselling services, it is a matter of helping those families cope better. A very targeted and important initiative, we believe, is income management for child

protection where, if that struggle is so severe that it is resulting in the neglect of children, we can actually recommend to Centrelink that a family's income is managed and is quarantined for essential purposes, 70 per cent of it. That is the very pointy end, if you like, but then there is the whole range of family support services that the department, the government funds and provides largely through non-government organisations, as well as our own responsible parenting services, all of which help families really cope better, manage better, the range of circumstances they are up against. In this year's budget, the important initiative that the minister mentioned when describing the increases in funding would be the rollout of responsible parenting services throughout the country regions, through royalties for regions funding. That is a critical service from our perspective, because it really does help those families who are most struggling with their children, and overall, to cope, but also, as I said, we provide around \$100 million of non-government funding for homelessness; HUGS has been mentioned; and financial counselling. But a large proportion of that is more broadly targeted for family support. An important initiative this year that is mentioned in the budget papers is working with the non-government sector to build formal alliances of those services so that they are more integrated among themselves, have a common entry point so that it is not a lottery what service a person chooses to go to, and more closely integrating them with child protection services, so that where a family's needs are so critical that it requires child protection intervention, that we are also around the table. This initiative has been outlined in the secondary family support state plan for the next four years, which the minister launched recently, and we will see the first four of those, what we generically call family support hubs, established around the end of the year, early next year.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Just going on further about income management, it really is the one shining light, I believe, to make parents more responsible, because 70 per cent of their income is quarantined, the bills are paid. They are not just cut aside; they actually are taught about finances and also the children are not neglected and we have a very unique system in Western Australia, and the Hon Sue Ellery and myself are 100 per cent behind our unique system of income management, because neglect is the trigger. I note that before the federal government went into caretaker mode, it was looking at a different system. I wrote to Jenny Macklin asking if our unique system could be kept in Western Australia, because it does work, and it is working.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, it may be useful just to explain, just very briefly, the characteristics of the unique system in Western Australia.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The unique system uses neglect as a trigger, so if you have got children and you are at the pub every night, the parents are at the pub every night, the children are not going to school, they are wandering the streets and they are dirty—obvious neglect signs—what we can do is refer them to Centrelink, and Centrelink sits down with them and says that they are a good candidate to go onto income management. They are put on income management; 70 per cent of their income from Centrelink is quarantined, the bills are paid, and they get 30 per cent—it is up to 70 per cent; it can be less, or 50 per cent—put on a basics card, and they can only use that for food and necessities; they cannot buy alcohol, they cannot buy cigarettes. Therefore, the children are getting fed. The women, if there is a domestic violence issue, the domestic violence is less if they are not being badgered for money. A lot of women in society get violently hit because the perpetrator wants the money in cash; there is no cash, and the card buys proper food. Therefore, the kids go to school, there is less domestic violence, and we are finding that it actually works. So our trigger is specifically the neglect of children.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am still not sure that the question I asked was answered, but maybe I can ask this of the minister rather than the department. The HUGS program is about, once you have got yourself into difficulty, you can get assistance to get yourself out of that difficulty on a one-off basis. I assume that it is a one-off basis, and that you cannot keep going back for HUGS. Once you have had the one payment, how many times can you go back and get assistance to pay your bills?

**Mr Murphy:** Currently it is just the once for the bill, except in exceptional circumstances, but we are having a look at that.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** We have increased the amount of money that they can get quite considerably.

**Mr Murphy:** That is once a year, not once in a lifetime.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** A lot of seniors and self-funded retirees, and probably for a lot of families as well, will simply not allow themselves to get into that position, but they will turn their heaters off, whether gas or electric, rather than incur a bill they cannot fund. Does the minister accept that that is the case and, if she does accept it, what are we doing to help those people?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Of course, some seniors in our society are very vulnerable; I would be a fool not to admit that, because that is the case, but we have the seniors' centre, and in the last estimates I pointed out that we have a seniors' centre, we have seniors' discounts and we have discounts on electricity, water and rates coming through the seniors' card holders, so we are a government that understands that there are some seniors doing it tough, and we were the first government to introduce free transport in off-peak hours, which is a real help to those seniors out there. They tell me all the time what a bonus that is to them, but there is always more that you can do, and as a concerned government, we take these issues on board. The money that we give for the HUGS program has increased considerably. I have not got the figures on me, but I think I have seen \$700 and \$1 500 for up north, and it is not only for electricity, it is for gas, and we have brought back —

[1.45 pm]

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Minister, I have moved on from the HUGS program and all the things we were talking about with HUGS. I think you acknowledged that there will be people that will simply not incur the expenditure. They will leave the heater turned off rather than incur the expenditure, so they will never get into the program that would allow them to seek funding under HUGS. Have you initiated any discussions with your colleagues, for example, in Treasury or Energy, to try to come up with a new scheme to assist those people deal with the dramatic increases they face for gas, electricity and water for that matter?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Cabinet discussions are always confidential, of course, but as a minister in the community, I said to you before that I would be silly to not acknowledge that there are seniors who are doing it tough. There are always ongoing discussions about how we can do things better. You tell me that we are not discussing the HUGS program, yet you are talking about electricity.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am talking about people who do not get captured into the HUGS program.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, but I am talking about the HUGS program. I guess what we do out there is promote that these are available—the HUGS and the seniors' discounts are available. I am hoping that if people do get into trouble, they will ring up the utilities or go to the services that can help them. That is what we need to promote.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is fine for those that do, minister. I do not know about you, but my parents would never incur the expenditure, let alone go to the state. They would not come to their children. My brothers and I would help my parents if they were in those sorts of circumstances. They would not even come to their own children, let alone the state. They are the ones I am asking about. My parents seem to manage okay, as far as I know.

**Mr Murphy:** We could make a home visit!

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** You would have to find my mother at home!

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** If I do not know that they exist, how can I help them? If I do not know who they are, how can I help?

**The CHAIR:** That is the only question the members is asking. I think the question is: are you aware that there may be those out there, have you tried to identify them —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Or come up with a policy response to assist those people. If we accept that there are people in the community like that that will never be in a position to take advantage of HUGS, they will sit there in a cold house because of the increases in the gas and power prices. They will never incur the expenditure, so HUGS will never be of any use to them. What policy responses is the government looking at, or are you looking at any government policy responses, to assist those people?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** If I do not know about them, I cannot help them. We have the cost of living rebate and the seniors' centre —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But you accepted that they are there, earlier.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes; I would be a fool to say that they do not exist. Of course there are people out there who are too proud to go for help, but if we do not know they need help, how can we help them? We can only help people by doing what we are doing, which is advertising that there is a cost of living rebate and advertising that the seniors' centre exists. We can have as many non-government agencies that help people out there, but if they do not know they exist, then they cannot help them.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** With all due respect, the cost of living rebate—we covered that in the earlier session—does not even cover the increased costs that your government has imposed on seniors.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Are you going somewhere with this? I have answered the questions that you have wanted me to answer. If people do not come to me or come to the government or come to their children and we do not know they need help, I cannot help them and you cannot help them. I have admitted that there are seniors who certainly will not go for help, but unless somebody knows that they need help, how do we go out and help those people?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** They will stay in their homes and be cold rather than incur the expenditure. That is the point. I thought that you accepted that was there case, earlier.

**The CHAIR:** I think the minister has accepted that is the case.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am trying to find out whether there is a policy response.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** How can there be a policy response when I do not know these people exist? We have been a very caring government. We have the seniors' booklet and seniors' discount. People are very aware of the seniors' centre. We have advertised to the 240 000 seniors that get the government rebate. They get letters sent to them and booklets sent to them when they turn 60. Every senior in the state who turns 60 knows that there is help out there and that it is available for them. Whether they choose to take it— because I do not know that they exist, I cannot go into their homes and say to each of those people, "You need help. How can we help you?" I said to you, "Yes, there are some people who are like that." My own parents and your parents would be like that, but until they come forward for help, there is nothing that I can do except what we are doing now, which is advertising very clearly that we have all this government assistance out there, and Centrelink, the federal government, has all this assistance out there. If people really need help, they know that they should go and ask for it. Even though they do not want to, there comes a point where people need to ask for help.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Minister, does the cost of living rebate cover the costs that your government has imposed on seniors?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** You have a short memory, Hon Ken Travers, about your government and your commitments.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** We never increased ordinary fees and charges above the inflation rate in eight years minister; you have.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** There has never ever been a government that has given a cost of living rebate except us, and I am very proud about that.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But there has never been a government that has increased the cost of living like your government has.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** You need to remember about your million dollar homes you were going to tax not so long ago when you were in government, and a few other things, Hon Ken Travers. You have a very short memory.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am asking you whether you think the cost of living rebate covers what is being imposed on seniors.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Your are just political point-scoring, Hon Ken Travers.

**The CHAIR:** Hold it, please. Keep the answers to the questions and the questions contained rather than any point-scoring and also the answers without any point-scoring because the point-scoring just washes over my head, I can tell you. The question, which I think was a fair question, was whether the cost of living increases have been greater than people can bear.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Has this government increased the cost of living for seniors by a greater amount than the cost of living rebate that they are given?

**The CHAIR:** That is a fair question.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I am very sure that the \$157.22 for couples and \$104.80 for singles will go a long way toward helping their cost of living, and I am very proud to be part of a government that has given a cost of living rebate.

**The CHAIR:** Fair enough, minister.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** That was my answer.

**The CHAIR:** I understand the feelings. I think the question was more rigorous than that. It is just whether it was —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** It is alright, Hon Philip Gardiner; I realise the ministers does not want to answer the question because she does not like it.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The minister answered the question in the way the minister wanted to. I have given an answer.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** You have given an answer but you have not answered the question.

**The CHAIR:** The answers need to be to the question. Hon Liz Behjat.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Thank you, Deputy Chair. Page 707 of the budget papers —

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** Are we off seniors, generally?

**The CHAIR:** We will come back to that, Hon Linda Savage.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** The dot point at the top of page 707 relating to family and domestic violence—I guess it is probably not appropriate to speak about individual cases, but just yesterday in my electorate we saw the dreadful case of the man there who doused his home in petrol and held his child and all those sorts of problems. We all saw that on the news last night and were all quite horrified by it. What I would be interested to know is—I am presuming because of the nature of the response to that that it would have been quite costly to the police—the man's family was being interviewed and they said that this was a cry for help from this man. This dot point talks about the state strategic plan for family and domestic violence. Is your department working with the mental health commissioner in relation to trying to identify these sorts of issues before they get to the point



where it got to yesterday; that is, that someone was crying out for help so much that he felt he had to go to those lengths?

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

**Mr Murphy:** There are no easy answers to this question because people with various mental health issues and different struggles in the community are not subject to around-the-clock government assistance. The community or society could manage that. We work very closely with mental health and with mental health services in the Department of Health in particular, because they are currently the largest provider of health services, but also organisations like Ruah, which is a large provider of non-government services. We will be working very closely with Centrecare, who have recently been funded for a statewide suicide prevention strategy. With mental health itself, we actually have a memorandum of understanding—a formal agreement—with mental health about how we will case refer, share information and co-manage cases or both-support families. The next stage of that agreement with mental health services in the Department of Health is to roll out local agreements so that our services on the ground are well connected. While formal agreements do not mean that we work together perfectly, they do provide the framework for doing so and a safety net where our own business may work together as effectively as we can. We work very hard at that. I have just indicated that it is largely with the mental health services of the Department of Health because the Mental Health Commission has been established as a policy group and a purchaser of those services. Whereas previously we might have had our first partnership with the mental health office in the Department of Health, now we work more directly where the services are. Although, with the Mental Health Commission, we work jointly on other things as well. Just today we had a working party on Aboriginal healing to look at the responses we make for Aboriginal people who are subject to sexual abuse or longer term trauma. Mental health services that have been developed for Aboriginal people will be a key part of where we connect for the wellbeing of Aboriginal families that we work with.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** It is hard to talk about individual cases, I know, but, for instance, if someone from that man's family—they were being interviewed on television last night saying this was a cry for help. My concern as a mum was there was an 11-year-old child at the centre of this thing that happened yesterday. The major concern would have to be the welfare of that child. If that man's family had come to Child Protection with some information and said, "Look, I think this is an issue and someone needs to help my brother," do we have enough safeguards in place that someone could have stepped in, had the family taken action?

**Mr Murphy:** I absolutely believe so.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Because we have trained social workers at the department—we have trained psychologists—I am sure that alarm bells would have started to go off. One would hope so.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Would the department act on the actions and remove a family member on a suspicion?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No. They would certainly go around and—if the social worker felt there was an immediate danger, they would certainly make a home visit, and they prioritise in the department on what they think is an immediate risk.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** The seniors are a growing group. There is already quite a lot of research on the concerns about the abuse of elderly people and the isolation within their own families and the financial pressure put upon them. Hon Ken Travers talked about those who will not reach out for help. I think that will be a growing issue for us as a society. Within the seniors policy area, are you beginning to develop a policy or think about how we are going to, as a society, deal or try to keep in

touch with what will be a growing group of individually isolated people, perhaps particularly women, I gather, who will be living without their partner?

[2.00 pm]

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I guess the only part of what you have asked that is child protection is women and domestic violence—I guess older women. As for seniors, that was this morning and that is communities. When I visited England some time ago they were doing a lot with elder abuse. The Department for Communities is certainly looking at elder abuse now.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** Because of HUGS they would be a group that you are seeing that you would be interacting with and perhaps would be a way—if you were looking at how those people that Hon Ken Travers said were not coming forward, if you were looking to find them because of the hardship aspect that might identify them for other issues —

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** They would not necessarily come into the Department for Child Protection.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** I know that. I am sorry, I should have asked it earlier.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It would only come to the department's attention if somebody came in and spoke about their grandma or whatever —

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** And their financial problems.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes. I would hope that the person who was sitting there would listen about grandma and do something. The focus of Child Protection is on child protection.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** Yes, I realise that.

**The CHAIR:** I want to continue on from that question. The expenditure for child protection is a big budget of \$430-odd million. How short are you of the resources necessary to service the needs if you had your total druthers at your control?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** If you go back in history—I am not playing this politically, I am playing it straight—probably the last two years of the Labor government they realised that Child Protection had not been funded adequately. It had not been; it had been allowed to become an abysmal department. I was very active, as were others. I was the first to say that that department needed to be split into two. It needed to focus on child protection and communities needed to be communities. The government, to its credit, got Prudence Ford in and the Ford report was an excellent report. Prudence Ford spoke to me—she did not have to, but she did because she is very good at her job—and spoke to many, many others in the community. The past two ministers went to Treasury for demand funding for the department. The department was totally overhauled starting with the new director general, Terry Murphy, who is an excellent director general. The work team he brought around him is a good team and the department operates really well. It is not without its faults; no big department that deals with emotional issues or children is without its faults. But it is a lot better than it was and we are moving ahead full steam. We have 3 300 children in care and we have demand funding to meet their needs. We have also increased the subsidy for foster carers. We have done programs to get in more foster carers. From the television campaign we had more than 2 000 people interested. From that we had more than 200 applications and 111 of those have been put on the books. The answer to the question is: yes, we have enough to run the department, but we could always, always do with more. Certainly Treasury has a demand model down pat and we can always go back at the mid-year review if we need to.

**The CHAIR:** I will go further with that question. You talked about foster carers and children and homes. Really, that is after the event the way I see it. If you want to be more pre-emptive, what additional resources might you need to get to those parents as soon as they have given birth—maybe that is where the problems begin—or six months before they give birth so that you do not get

the same need for foster care? What resources would you need to get the pre-emptive part of it right as well?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Certainly the more you have got, the more you have, the more you need, the more you want. It is an endless bucket when you are talking about prevention and early intervention. I was pleased to be able to get \$28 million out of royalties for regions for responsible parenting. Responsible parenting is there for parents. It was certainly an initiative under the previous government; the initiative was there, but the money for the roll-out was not. I had discussions with Treasury about royalties for regions. In 2010-11 we will be putting it in the Murchison and the Great Southern; in 2011-12 we will be rolling it out to the Pilbara and the Goldfields; and, in 2012-13 the Wheatbelt and the South West. A lot of money is going into that. That will be run by the department. We have some responsible parenting programs around. That focus is on the parents' behaviour. It is done by voluntary cooperation because you cannot go into somebody's house and say "Right, you will do this and you will do that", especially when you have dysfunctional parents. If we can go in and help them and cooperate and get their trust within the 12 months and they do what it is expected of them, that is a good thing. If they do not, we can use the court system to force them into cooperating. Therefore, the kids have responsible parents. It is as the word says—"responsible" parenting.

**The CHAIR:** The implications of the cost of all this goes into the crime area. If we can get this part right then some of those costs in the crime area and in the imprisonment area and all that kind of area can then fall away. If we put more money in, it is a matter of what resources. I accept what the minister said. However, how much resources—let us not put it in terms of dollars costs. How many more people with sociology and psychology skills would be needed to reduce the dysfunction at the time that children are born?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is not so much psychologists. I think we all understand—I know Hon Linda Savage is keen on this area too—that if we can get the parenting right in the first place, a lot of those social ills would disappear; and if we can get it right enough early enough—that is what we are striving to do. There are parenting programs throughout Western Australia and there is a parenting centre that I am ramping up at the moment. A lot of people might not know that they can ring up the parenting centre, they can get one-to-one counselling within that centre from anywhere in Western Australia. It is a free call. If they need more help, there are books and videos. The government will send those out free of charge to the parent who phones up in distress. The parenting centre is used by educated people who know that the parenting centre is there and available. We need to get to people who are dysfunctional. The department tries to do that. We have various programs. One that springs to mind is Best Beginnings. It is a really good program. I will hand you over to the director to talk about that one.

**Mr Murphy:** As you know, you are asking the \$64 question: how to go further upstream to prevent people, crime, child protection and so forth? For our department we are tightly focused on targeting our services to vulnerable families. As you say, kids who come into care is the final part of that. Intervening where there is neglect and abuse precedes that. Not all cases where we intervene where there is neglect and abuse are children brought into care. The way we work in Child Protection is to work with families with an uncompromising approach to the safety of children. We will remove them if necessary. But if we can, we will work with a family to build safety around that child using their family resources. That may include extended family or other agencies such as mental health, drug and alcohol particularly, non-government family support services who might be able to work with and support that family. There is a system there and direct support for the parents so that the children do not need to go into care. Behind that is getting to families before even child protection concerns arise. That is the suite of family support services. The minister explained responsible parenting that we provide in some detail. Earlier I mentioned that we also fund the non-government sector for a large number of family support services, as the does the commonwealth government. One of the difficulties with those services at the moment though is that they are very disparate.

They have grown up in a responsive way, responsive to community and family needs, but not in an organised planned fashion that might get the best out of those services. I outlined before where we are looking for those services to form formal alliances in regions and have a common entry point and link in an integrated way with child protection services. This reform was undertaken in Victoria. What we have found is that we can provide more services to more people even within existing resources because with disparate services, any one family may be being seen by four or six services when it might be best with two or three. We can do better there. That said, I return to the origin of the question: if we had the druthers, what would we put in? As the minister indicated you can always spend more money, because community need when it comes to family and community dysfunction is as long as a piece of string. It is important to anticipate one important government decision and how it links to those family support hubs; that is, the extension of mandatory reporting. This government has anticipated extending it to all forms of abuse and neglect and that will uncover many more of those families who need very targeted support. That is why it is critical that we have those alliances and common entry points and that we anticipate the demand to effectively service those families and work through that process with Treasury at my level and through government.

**The CHAIR:** That is helpful. As I suspect, we have a storm cloud on the horizon as a result of the baby bonus, because a lot of children are born into dysfunctional families as a result of the baby bonus giving the wrong incentive for the wrong age to have children, especially among Aboriginal communities. Have you already taken that storm cloud on the horizon into account?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Certainly the federal government did. The money was used unwisely when it was given in a lump sum. The federal government realised that and it is now given in 13 fortnightly payments of \$388. I could be incorrect; it is around that figure. That was the reason that that was done. We live in a democratic society and the only way that we could make it easier on those families was to pay them in 13 fortnightly payments. If everybody else gets the \$5 000 bonus, just because you are young and Aboriginal you should still get your baby bonus even though I know that sometimes that is probably giving out the wrong message. The fact is that it is there for all Australians and it is probably the children who will suffer if you start taking it away from anyone.

[2.15 pm]

**The CHAIR:** I guess the implication that I was getting to is that there is no out year expenditure planning for that possibility?

**Mr Murphy:** That is built in, although not specifically to the circumstance of an increased occurrence of childbirth; however, the increase in population and the adjusted increase for social need is built into our demand modelling for funding.

**The CHAIR:** As a general case?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes.

As the minister indicated, that has been absolutely critical to this department's sound functioning—being able to keep up with demand. You —

**The CHAIR:** As I see it, you are still fighting with one hand behind your back, because although you are talking about disparate services and trying to integrate them, the one thing that I have not heard about either this morning or this afternoon is the issue of unemployment. When you have a dysfunctional family, with a young mother of 14 or 15, or 16 or 17, and a partner who is unemployed, possibly resorting to alcohol and is abusive and those kinds of things, there has to be an integrated plan. He will not get a job by simply being told get a job. We need to give employers an incentive to hire him. Have you considered that issue; and if so, have you been able to do anything about it?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** We are Child Protection and children usually come to our attention through either one of two ways; they come through the mandatory reporting line, which is through

doctors, midwives, teachers, nurses and police, or they come through a district office—where somebody anonymously reports them. Or they may come in off the street to complain about a child living two doors up. By the time Child Protection gets to hear about these children, it is probably quite a way down the line. If we knew about them earlier, it would make it a lot easier. However, in Australian society a lot of people still have this view that that is private business and that it is not their business. It is the same with domestic violence. Although those barriers are now being broken down and people will step in, many people out there will not go to Child Protection to say that a child is being harmed. That is why the mandatory reporting line is so good; people will just pick up the phone and they can either do it anonymously or say who they are, whereas they will probably not come into a district office to report something. It is very difficult. A lot of the time it breaks your heart to realise that you have not known about child until it is too late—too late, because they are taken away. If we can, we put in earlier intervention services, and in a lot of cases we do, but there are many, many cases that we do not know about. I will hand over to the director.

**The CHAIR:** Do you wish to make any other remarks?

**Mr Murphy:** I will just make the point that it is better to be managing these problems in an economic boom than it is in an economic downturn because you are right—unemployment feeds dysfunctionality. For families getting back on top of whatever struggle they are going through, getting a job is part of that recovery. The fact is that there are jobs in our community for those who, by and large, want to work and who are work ready and able to work. That makes the task of families getting back on their feet more possible. We all know about the serious pockets of dysfunction, particularly in remote communities, for Aboriginal people, and in regional towns and so on. As a result, we get more child protection and domestic violence challenges and everything in between.

**The CHAIR:** I have heard enough, thank you.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** I have a couple of questions following on from things you have said—obviously about mandatory reporting. The experience of mandatory reporting in other states is that of departments being completely overwhelmed and unable to differentiate between what is serious and what is less serious. Is additional funding already earmarked for or be available on an on-demand basis in relation to the number of calls that will come in if the reporting categories are extended?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The categories will not be extended. The categories of abuse will be extended, but the categories of abuse mandatory reporting will not.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** But that presumably could lead to an increase.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** You heard the director speak about family support hubs. That is why we are bringing in family support hubs. We are demand funded. I expect that when it is brought in we will be ready for it. That is why I did not do it when I first came in. I was always committed to doing it because to me it is pointless having mandatory reporting for only sexual abuse, although I am very glad the Labor government introduced it. However, I would really like to see neglect, physical abuse and emotional abuse included. But we need to be ready. I do not want to overload the system. I am very, very conscious of that. I think that we are being very careful and very cautious in the way that the department is bringing that through.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** I take it that there will be extra specific funding, because it will bring more children or more reports, presumably. That was one question. I have quite a few other questions. I do not know whether we are still on that topic.

**The CHAIR:** No, I will ask Hon Ken Travers if he has a question and will come back to you.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** No, let Linda continue.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** I think it is accepted that there are particular families where there are generational child protection issues because the children who have been the subject of concern by Child Protection then have children quite early, and they often have quite a number of children. I asked in an earlier session, but it is more relevant to ask now, whether any particular new policies are being considered in regard to—what were in my own working experience—those cases identified as being in the very hard basket. I have even experienced amongst some caseworkers a concern that it was almost beyond them. It was so difficult to be involved because there were such security concerns for the caseworker going in. I am not for a moment suggesting that these families were abandoned, but I am saying that for the majority of cases it was not possible to deal with families using current methods because of the extent of the dysfunction and the extent of the dangers even for the people employed by the department. I assume you know what I am getting to. I am wondering how you deal with that; whether you look all the time to new policies or whether you try to develop new ways of dealing with that very difficult group, which is—in the way it was put to me—exponentially increasing.

[2.30 pm]

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** The numbers of children in care are growing by about seven per cent.

**Mr Murphy:** Five per cent.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** They are growing by about five per cent. All governments grapple with that. We know that we need to put money in at the early stages otherwise by the later stages we are talking about what you are just saying. I am a person who thinks it is never too late. We have to get those families and work with them. We have something called Strong Families which works across with a particular family and works intensively with them. With this responsible parenting I am hopeful, but because you have to voluntarily do it, it is very difficult when you have got all that dysfunction there —

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** I am suggesting something different—a very targeted policy on a group in the long term —

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I was going to bring in the director to say what he was doing with some of the families.

**Mr Murphy:** In some targeted areas we are doing that. In Kalgoorlie, for example, ourselves, youth justice and education are identifying a cohort of 20 families with whom to work. We do that in other regional areas. Then we do that in other ways too—through, for example, Strong Families which brings a range of agencies together for the hardest to target families. It really provides a very dedicated and long-term service with them. There are a couple of other examples. We mentioned intervening earlier with children. We intervene much earlier with pregnant women in the sort of families you are describing. We have had some remarkable results using the Signs of Safety approach; that is, everybody around the table, lining up all the support agencies where children have been able to return home to parents, to mothers particularly, when we may have all their previous children in care, yet closely supervising that and making sure that safety is not compromised in any way. The minister mentioned that children in care is growing by around five per cent. It was only a few years ago that it was growing by around 12 per cent. Every other state continues to grow around the 10 per cent mark of children in care. It is a combination of approaches that will not solve or cure the problems we have been talking about but we are getting a better grip on them. That is being reflected in the numbers.

**The CHAIR:** That is encouraging. Thank you.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am tempted to ask a question following on from that. Do we know what the driver is in that drop from 12 per cent to five per cent?

**Mr Murphy:** I would love to think it was our approach to child protection Signs of Safety. This is a system that was developed in Western Australia by looking at what the best child protection workers do that is effective. But, oddly enough, it has been implemented internationally more than it had been in WA until the last couple of years. In a place called Olmsted County in Minnesota, where it has been in place over 10 years, the result there was to halve the number of children in care, but to triple the number of families with whom the department works. It is shifting back upstream a bit. I think it is a bit early to claim that sort of success but I think it has been a contributing factor to the range of factors we have mentioned.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Do you know how many children currently are in the care of the CEO? Do we have an exact figure?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Three thousand three hundred and thirty.

**Mr Murphy:** It changes on a daily basis, but 3 330 is unlikely to be far out.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Do we have an idea of the different types of protection order they come under; whether they are interim or time limited until they are 18 or enduring parental responsibilities? Are you able to break it down into the different categories of orders under which they are in your care?

**Mr Murphy:** We certainly do know that.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** You may want to take it on notice.

**Mr Murphy:** We will take that on notice.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** And if there is a set reporting date that you normally work to, rather than trying to dig it out as of today's date, if you do it once at the end of every month or at the end of every week, whatever the last time you did that —

**Mr Murphy:** That is something we report quarterly. I think we would have that as at the end of 2009.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So 30 June.

**Mr Murphy:** No; 30 December 2009. If we have it later, I will provide that.

*[Supplementary Information No B2.]*

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Why would there be such a time lapse between when you report it from when it occurs?

**Mr Murphy:** Under our data system we could pull it out at any time. It does not change very rapidly. There is a fairly constant proportion in each category.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** If we can add into that also what proportion of children are three years of age and under.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes; we have that.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** And what proportion are Indigenous. Also, if you have any idea of different trends within each of those categories as to the percentage increases, or the trends in each of those categories, I would appreciate that. Do we know how many deaths there were of children in care in the last financial year?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No, because that went to the Ombudsman.

**Mr Murphy:** We do not have that figure in front of us and would take that on notice. There are likely to have been one or two. In any given year, there will be.

*[Supplementary Information No B3.]*

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I would have thought the department would know how many there are. You refer them to the Ombudsman, do you not? Are you saying now you do not have any role at all?

**Mr Murphy:** The system as it works is I, on a daily basis, receive notification from the coroner of any death 17 years or under. We then check those against our records and refer, under the criteria spelt out in the Ombudsman's legislation, those deaths that qualify for a child death review. That criteria includes any child for whom there has been a notification to us of suspected child abuse in the past two years or where we have had a pattern of contact with the family. That would include any child who is in care. In any year the Ombudsman then goes on to investigate a proportion of those who we refer. Any child in care would be investigated. My recollection, for example, last year is that there was one child who died as a result of a vehicle accident. As I say, in any year there is likely to be one or two who, through some sort of misadventure, may die.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Can we have included in B3 how many deaths of children in care, the ages of the children and whether or not they were referred to the Ombudsman?

**Mr Murphy:** They would have been referred to the Ombudsman.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** They all would have?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes, all would have.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** If they are in your care, they all get referred to the Ombudsman?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But if they are children who are not in your care, they only get referred if they fall within the criteria?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** The special guardianship legislation is referred to on page 707 of the *Budget Statements*. Using international experience, or any other experience that the department is aware of, do we have any idea of how many carers we can anticipate will pursue the option of special guardianship?

**The CHAIR:** Which dot point?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Page 707

**The CHAIR:** Which dot point?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** It is the third dot point.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No; we cannot really anticipate how many carers will take up the special guardianship order. It is another order along with what we have. We have the foster care situation. This will overtake the permanency order. It gives carers who have had the care of children a chance to apply to the courts for guardianship of that child. That child will always know who its parents are. If it has siblings, they will always know who they are. There will be contact with the —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Minister, with all due respect, and in light of the time, I understand what a special guardianship order will do —

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I cannot anticipate how many people will take up this order.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is fine. That is the answer I was looking for—whether you did or did not have an idea, based on international experience, of how many you are going to have.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I will rephrase that. We did go to England. We did see that it was working very well. But you asked me: did I have any idea how many people would take it up here. I do not know how many people will take it up here.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is fine. That is all I want to know.

How many enduring parental responsibility protection orders are currently in place?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Approximately 130.



**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Under the special guardianship orders, is it expected the department will have the same financial responsibilities as you do as foster parents? Would there be any change in terms of budget issues for the department as to whether or not a foster child is fostered or under an SGO?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I do not anticipate any change. If people want to keep the foster care subsidy, that is what we will be doing.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Has the department identified any other implications for the budget either within your agency or within other agencies that will occur as a result of the implementation of the SGOs; and what are those budget implications?

**Mr Murphy:** Enduring parental responsibility orders, which these will replace, do result in some carers not receiving the subsidy and the same level of case support. It is important, as the minister has indicated, though, in anticipating special guardianship orders that we do not have that starting point of not having case support from the department or the foster care subsidy. We are not anticipating or planning for any reduction in expenditure as a result. We have to be open to continuing to support the family, particularly contact arrangements with the birth family, and financially. With respect to other departments, we have had some discussions with Legal Aid. They anticipate that there may be some pressure on them by virtue of more applications being made.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Applications by the birth parents or whom?

**Mr Murphy:** By either the department or foster carers, and those applications being opposed by birth parents.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Do they also provide legal assistance for the individual child as well?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes. It is less likely that those sorts of cases would have the child individually represented but it is likely that there will be some birth parents who oppose applications. However, we have to see this within the context of permanency planning and the fact that a special guardianship order is not the initial order but it would follow a time-limited order which has already been worked through with the family. It really should entail no surprises for the birth family.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Are there any other agencies you have identified? Greater support will need to be given to the birth parents if they want to try to clean up their lives so the SGO is not issued. Alcohol and drug counselling and things like that—has there been any quantification of what impacts that may have on those agencies?

**Mr Murphy:** That is the way we work with families at the moment. I think you are right, though, that there will be a greater incentive and a greater urgency for birth families to get their act together because they understand —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** You would hope so.

**Mr Murphy:** We hope so. They cannot faff about for so long, particularly with an addiction, because the option of getting their act together will expire. It is impossible to quantify that precisely. What we are doing, though, as I outlined with mental health before, we are working the same with drug and alcohol services and we are reorganising family support services. And last year's budget doubled the number of non-government funded intensive family support and reunification services. So there is a whole range of services there that we can bring to bear in those circumstances.

[2.45 pm]

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But is the intention, though, to ensure that if a birth parent needs counselling or assistance to deal with drug or alcohol issues, that they will have access to those services? Is that going to be a part of the framework that you established, so that if someone's child is likely to be subjected to an SGO, that before that and whilst they are still on an interim order, the

parents will be able to access those services, that there will be a guarantee that they can access those services before an SGO is issued?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** There is no difference to what we do now. I mean, there is a two-year time limited order and parents know that there are guidelines that they have to follow so that in the two-year time limited order they can have their children back. So it is virtually no different to what it is now. I guess if I can say that the reason for the special guardianship is that I cannot justify children being in 40 different homes. I mean, I have had an 18-year-old in front of me tell me how he felt, and he had been in 40 different homes. By the time these little ones have been in three or four different homes, they feel worthless; they have different rules for each house they come to. I try to put myself in a little one's shoes each time that they are moved. I have been in the department when they come in with their stuff in a garbage bag, and my heart just goes—I just cannot describe it. It is awful. The reason for the special guardianship is so that these kids will not be mucked around. It is probably the first time in Australia, although we have gone in during parenting orders, that we are putting the children first. And that does not mean that we have to not put the birth parents' intentions out there and take care of that, but I am just saying that it is the same as what it is now, the two-year time limited order.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I think we just all agreed—maybe I was wrong—that there will be increased pressure on the parents to get their act together quicker than under the current system.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, there will be.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am not having a go at the idea, I am just trying to understand what resources will be available and whether or not as part of that framework there is assistance for the parents; because I think we all would probably accept that the best place for a child is with its birth parents as long as the birth parents can take good care of the child.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** That is right.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So, getting the parents to the point where they can take good care of the child and giving them the support to do that, I would have thought, was part of the framework that we were aiming for and that is why I was just trying to understand whether or not that trying to get to that point will have financial implications on what they were.

**Mr Murphy:** If I can come at this in a couple of ways, I have mentioned some areas where we have increased those resources and it may be that within our demand funding that we receive each year there is a reprioritisation from supporting children in care to, for example, supporting intensive family support or reunification services. So we have the flexibility to do that. A broader point I would make is that in our signs of safety approach we have really shied away from telling parents, “Now, you've got to go to drug and alcohol counselling” or “You've got to go to anger management counselling” and so on. Rather we have said, “You've got to get sober and you've got to stop beating your wife. We don't care how you do that, but that is the behaviour we want to see. Now, if you get sober by going to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting every day for three months, which is what they recommend, that costs you nothing and it costs the community nothing. Or if you go into a residential rehabilitation arrangement with one of the major agencies, that does cost something and there is demand for that.” But there are many different ways to skin a cat, and we have a very rich service system and good interrelationships of those services with Child Protection. I think the combination of our relationships, the expectations on the people and our ability to be flexible with where we increase funding we are confident will prevent problems arising.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** I just want to ask following that, because that two-year period that we are talking about where a child has been placed or may have been placed for longer, but we have got this two-year period we are using to be the trigger for this new application that can be made, which I assume is made by the department or on behalf of the carer?

**Mr Murphy:** An important part of this legislation is that a carer is able to apply themselves, but we would anticipate in most cases that the department would be making that application.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** So, we are not really talking here about children being moved around in places; we are talking about children who have a very stable placement.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Exactly.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** Just looking, though, from the birth parents' perspective, let us say you do have the two years and you clean your act up, I understand at the moment it is three years waiting even on the priority housing list. So, how would that intersect with a parent who has cleaned their act up but cannot house their child, which would mean they were not in a position to have their child back?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I would be the first one to be extremely happy if they cleaned their act up and we would do all we could to help them get a house. The special guardianship order is not for everybody, but if we can see them making—it is not hard and fast because what we work with in Child Protection is not an exact science.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** No.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** But certainly we would do all we could to help them get a house so that they could get their child back.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** I am asking because if the carer can make the application themselves and the birth parent cannot house the child, would the intervention of the department obviously mean you would not support the application of the carer because you had a birth parent who now could care for the child but could not get housing?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It would have to be on a case-by-case basis, and I could not tell you off the cuff because it is actually real people that we deal with and it would have to be a case-by-case situation; it really would be. And it is the same as now: it is a case-by-case situation because while I can say they are all the same, they are also unique. And I know that does not make any sense but there is certain dysfunction that a lot of people have but unique to the age of the child and who they are with.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** I must say that I have not really looked at the bill, but is there no difference between the legal status of this new order compared to enduring parental responsibility? I mean you said it did not make any difference in the relationship. How does this guardianship compare to, say, adoption or something like that?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Just the word adoption brings up harsh connotations. To me adoption is very closed, whereas special guardianship is not.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** So, does it mean the parent could ever have a chance of getting the child back?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No, the reason we are bringing in the special guardianship is so that children will have stability. There are too many children out there—and there always have been too many children out there—who are being moved around and we cannot have that.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** And I appreciate that, minister, and agree.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I know that you understand that.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** But we are talking about a different category. We are talking about where a carer wants the child.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** And the child has been stable in that situation. This may not be the time, perhaps, as I said I am not familiar with the bill, but I am just trying to understand what the actual

legal status is with this special guardianship order compared to existing orders, like the enduring parental responsibility and adoption. But that is something I can look into. I will not hold things up.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I am very happy to allow you to have a briefing if you want.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Your final dot point on page 707 says —

The Department faces and anticipates continuing challenges in the attraction and retention of staff, particularly in regional and remote Western Australia.

I am assuming that is not all parts of regional Western Australia.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** That is where we started. That was my very first question. Were you listening?

**The CHAIR:** Hon Ken Travers, keep going.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It has been a long day!

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** What I want to know is: which areas have the highest problems with the retention of staff?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I believe it is in the north west, but I will hand over to Mr Murphy.

**Mr Murphy:** I think, minister, that is a pretty safe bet! Our highest vacancies tend to be in the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields. They shift around a bit between those, but even in that order they are the toughest ones to fill. The Wheatbelt can be surprising too. For example, we have a very stable, strong staff team in Moora at the moment, but they are all older than me which means they will not be around —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So still pretty young!

**Mr Murphy:** Thanks very much! Correct! Absolutely! I think you were referring to the minister there; not me!

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Both of you.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Seeing as how we are the same age!

**Mr Murphy:** But when they go we know that it will be a really hard area to fill. So, it shifts around but it tends to be, as I say, Kimberley, Pilbara, Goldfields. The regional centres are less difficult than the smaller towns. So, when it comes to Newman, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek and so forth, they are more difficult than Port Hedland, Kununurra and Broome. But then there are other small towns too, such as Laverton, Leonora in the Murchison which are also very difficult.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So do we have any figures on what the staff turnover is and the number of people you have in filling positions in those areas on short-term or casual positions? I know in the past you have done that where you have taken people from other areas for short-term contracts and relocated them into some of these hard-to-staff areas.

**Mr Murphy:** We do, and we keep quite detailed numbers on our HR. I would have to say in every one of those hard-to-fill towns at the moment we have almost full staffing and we have built very solid teams. I would also note that —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Full staffing on a permanent basis or on short-term contracts?

**Mr Murphy:** No; on a permanent basis. We will always fill positions permanently when we can. Our turnover of child protection workers—that is, people who have the statutory right to remove a child—runs at about nine per cent. Now, interestingly, compare that with Victoria; they run at over 25 per cent. So, we think we are doing pretty well because they are very difficult jobs, as we touched on earlier, and they are jobs that young people come in and it may or may not be their cup of tea. But we think we have got a relatively low level of turnover compared nationally.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But are we able to get those figures for each of the different regions across Western Australia of the turnover figures; is that something we are able to get as supplementary information?

**Mr Murphy:** Yes. I guess we would probably ask you to narrow it a degree because it would be quite complicated to calculate annual turnover for X number of years in each location. Some of that would actually require going back over —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Maybe as a couple of examples. I think you said Kimberley was the worst.

**Mr Murphy:** Yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Then you talked about the Gascoyne or the Mid West area. Was it the Mid West or the Gascoyne?

**Mr Murphy:** The outer reaches of the Mid West.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I was trying to get a sort of a sample of the different degrees. I think you said the Kimberley was the worst, then the Pilbara and then Kalgoorlie; but then you also talked about some of the smaller towns. I think you talked about Leonora. So I am just looking —

**The CHAIR:** Can you reply with maybe three in each of the zones?

**Mr Murphy:** That is if we could put together an illustration of staff turnover in difficult-to-fill regions for you, looking at both towns and regions.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Or the other way might be to pick a state seat and look at that in terms of it has got a good array of —

**The CHAIR:** You want a spectrum?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I was thinking maybe Geraldton and the north west, because that would go from the Pilbara through the Mid West and give you sort of a range.

**Mr Murphy:** If we could use our boundaries; we call it the Murchison, Geraldton and the whole Mid West and Gascoyne and Kimberley.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** All right, yes, something like that.

**Mr Murphy:** That is quite a comparative illustration using the regional centres in small towns.

**The CHAIR:** Supplementary question B4 will be staff turnover in a sample of the Department for Child Protection regions.

*[Supplementary Information No B4.]*

[3.00 pm]

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I can go back five years, when there was a complete turnover in staff and I think we were looking at over 50 FTEs. Things have certainly improved, as the director was the saying.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** I have a related question on staff. Talking about the age of people, say, case workers, who are predominantly women, would it be true to say that many of the longer standing employees—or, what percentage are older women? In many organisations—non-government and government sectors—it is that older group of women who do this type of work.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Forty-five plus.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** Yes. That is a real concern in the non-government sector, although it is understandable for younger case workers with the type of work, the load of work and the confrontational nature of the work. You are obviously aware of that. I am trying to anticipate when you will have a large group due to retire.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** We do. As I said 48 per cent are over 45 years and 18 per cent are 55 years and over, which will really place pressures on us. In our work in child protection, it is really good to have that wisdom and knowledge of the older people, and when they go it is very hard to replace that wisdom and knowledge. When I have gone around to all the offices, I was really pleased to see that we have older and younger staff, and we have quite a few men as well. It is pleasing to see the age range, but certainly we do need to get younger people in while the older, more experienced ones are there because they mentor them.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** Would it be correct that the biggest turnover is in the younger age group, rather than the older age group? That is the sort of thing that is worrying, is it not, with the younger group?

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is very similar in nursing, child protection and teaching.

**The CHAIR:** Following on from that: in a way, the entry point of 45-ish is not bad if one is going into the child protection area. Your average age might be 52 or 53; would that be correct?

**Mr Murphy:** I think that is a reasonable argument, because we would much prefer to bring in mature people with the level of life experience they have, calmness, steadiness and a range of qualities they acquire over the years.

**The CHAIR:** Harking back to this morning about volunteering, you can get volunteers as mothers' children move on so they can go into this type of area. I thought it might be a relatively common thing.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** Yes, a lot of mature age people go into social work.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Do you do exit interviews? The minister was saying that two years ago there was a huge turnover.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** I said five years ago.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Whenever it was, but the period —

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** No, five years ago.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Whatever the period was, do we know whether they were going to other jobs in other areas that paid a lot more so they were changing profession, or were they leaving because they just could not cope with the job because of way the department operated,? Do we have any idea of what was causing the turnover?

**Mr Murphy:** A pretty good idea. Certainly five years ago a lot of people in exit interviews—even as recently as three years—a lot of people would say, “The ability of the department to support me was a factor in leaving.” That was before we had built capacity very, very substantially over those years, and we do not get those sort of comments made now. There is always a proportion of people who will say, “Not sure this work is for me”, or “looking for other opportunities”, and that is good and reasonable. There is always a proportion leaving for promotion and so on. With the younger ones, there is always a significant proportion leaving to travel and broaden their life experiences. There are a number of issues that are inarguable and I guess we accept a proportion who say, “We have tried this work and it is not for us.”

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I have some more questions. On page 707, the fourth dot point talks about education assessment plans, and my recollection is there is also a requirement for each child to have an individual health plan. At this stage, we have got education plans and you might still be in a pilot program with health plans. I am interested in the sort of systemic processes you have to follow up and ensure that the plans for each child are implemented.

**Mr Murphy:** If I may just, in a word, answer that, and the minister may reflect more broadly on education and health care planning—case management. Each child has a dedicated care plan that is

formal and is reviewed each 12 months with all the participants in providing that health plan. Case management is the means of implementing and monitoring that those plans are in place.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Is there any overarching review of that? You are saying it is the individual case manager, but what system sits above that to ensure that the case manager is doing that?

**Mr Murphy:** There are a couple of systems above that—it is really hierarchical—at a district level. There are relationships that are necessary between the health service and us, particularly the public education district but also individual schools and ourselves. Then, on the macro level, for the health plans, we collected all the data as to how many plans were in place, what they entailed and so forth for the first evaluation report, which informed the systems we put into place for the full roll-out over the next 18 months. And similarly for education plans, we seek to measure those at a macro level.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Right. I understand your comments earlier about having built up capacity and the rest of it, but I hark back to some of the inquiries this committee has done in the past. There still does not seem to be a formal system of ensuring that the plans are being implemented. If the case manager is on their game, then that is fine; but the if the case manager drops the ball —

**Mr Murphy:** We have formal agreements with health and with education for the implementation of these plans, and we do monitor the extent to which they are implemented across the department. They are not fully rolled out yet, so it is not possible to say we have X percentage in, because what we have done is spot measuring. But in the final analysis that three-layered system of individual case managers and then the district arrangements to make sure those relationships are in place and the managers are on the case, and then looking at the numbers as a department as a whole, I think, is pretty solid.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I think you said that you had formal agreements with Health and Education. What responsibility is then placed on Health and Education under those agreements? What are the formal responsibilities that are put on to Health and Education to ensure that those plans are being implemented?

**Mr Murphy:** Essentially, we have responsibility as the guardian of the child to bring the child to the places and initiate things, but the agreements say, very simply, that Health will provide an assessment, a plan and facilitate linkage to the various health services that the child requires. For education, we are actually fitting our kids into an existing system of documented education plans, and the agreement specifies that each child in care will have a documented education plan, and then the arrangements we have with each of the school sectors to make sure the schools know that those kids require that plan.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** And we have rapid response for our children in care.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am going on to another area.

**The CHAIR:** This is another area too. There is an early childhood project called Bidi Bidi, which you would be aware of, taking place in the Murchison.

**Mr Murphy:** No, I would have to take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** It is a little bit surprising in one sense, but in the other sense it is not because I understand it is the under the roof of the health department. It is working with early childhood education and parenting at the earliest level. You are not familiar with that project?

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Does it come under a federal program for children?

**The CHAIR:** No. This is totally separate funding from the royalties for region program. It is the Murchison group in Cue working particularly with Murchison Aboriginal communities—or maybe entirely with them, but at least significantly—with a very strong early childhood plan. I am a little surprised that it not under your area.

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It may be under communities, and certainly I have heard Brendon speak about the program, but I have not heard of it from anywhere else. We are Child Protection.

**The CHAIR:** I have referred to it in the Parliament. It is a very commendable program that may be of keen interest to you, given this is your area.

**Mr Murphy:** May I say I would be reasonably confident that our people would be linked in with programs like that, even when I do not know about every one.

**The CHAIR:** Fair enough; I understand that. I know it has under Health.

**Mr Murphy:** Once again, in the early childhood area where it comes to critical need as opposed to general support, we have arrangements with the Department of Health and other providers to make sure those linkages are there and the communication flows.

**The CHAIR:** It is almost time, and we have to close right on time.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am trying to work this out. When we started off the hearing, we talked about the money coming in, and you mentioned that some of that was commonwealth money. I also note that at the back, there are a number of items of commonwealth money listed under net appropriation determinations that you have been allowed to maintain as receipts. I am trying to work out how you book commonwealth money into your budget, because it would appear that you are getting more commonwealth money in than is reflected. I would have thought normally that would show up in the difference between total appropriation and the total cost of services. But if you add on the commonwealth money coming in to your total appropriation, your total cost of services is less than that. I am trying to work out how you bring commonwealth money to book into the accounts—or into your budget. That is just to finish on a nice question.

**Mr Peckitt:** Commonwealth funding is included within our total cost of services but not within our appropriation. The revenue comes from commonwealth to the Treasury, directly to us.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** The difference between your total cost of services and your total appropriation is about \$25 million, but then when you go to your net appropriations there is over \$32 million coming from the commonwealth. It did not quite reconcile for me. Then when we talked about some of the additional money, there was a bit of commonwealth money thrown in there, and I do not know that that money fitted into either of the categories that are listed under your net appropriations.

**Mr Peckitt:** The increase from the commonwealth between 2009–10 and 2010–11 is only approximately \$4 million.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Yes. Does that come in under the national affordable housing agreement or the national partnership agreement?

**Mr Peckitt:** There is approximately \$4 million through the national partnership agreement.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Right. If you look on page 716 under “Net Appropriation Determination” you are getting \$19 million under the “National Affordability Housing Agreement – Homelessness”.

**Mr Peckitt:** Yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** And then under the National Partnership Agreement – Homelessness, you are getting \$13 million so that is \$32.5 million.

[3.15 pm]

**Mr Peckitt:** Yes, that is correct.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So there is \$33 million or \$34 million—in fact, probably over \$35 million. But the total appropriation is \$417 million and the total cost of services is \$442 million. That is a



difference of \$25 million. You are receiving something in the order of \$35 million from the commonwealth. What has happened to that other \$10 million?

**Mr Peckitt:** Good question. In relation to these —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** It is a Treasury accounting procedure or something!

**Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY:** It is there.

**The CHAIR:** Would you like to take the question on notice and give us a reconciliation —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Of what the total commonwealth money you are receiving is and how that relates to your total cost of services versus the total appropriation.

**Mr Peckitt:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Are there any other questions?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Not in the view of the time although I do have a couple of others.

**The CHAIR:** I think we have done very well. The committee will forward any additional questions that it has to you in writing in the next couple of days, together with a transcript of evidence, which will include the questions you have taken on notice. If members have any unasked questions, I ask them to submit these to the committee clerk at the close of this hearing. Responses to these submitted questions following this hearing will be requested within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. Should the agency be unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. Thank you for an interesting session.

**The Witnesses:** Thank you.

**Hearing concluded at 3.16 pm**