

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND
FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

2015–16 ANNUAL REPORT HEARINGS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
THURSDAY, 3 NOVEMBER 2016**

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

Members

**Hon Rick Mazza (Chair)
Hon Peter Katsambanis (Deputy Chair)
Hon Alanna Clohesy
Hon Helen Morton
Hon Sally Talbot**

Hearing commenced at 9.31 am

Hon NICK GOIRAN

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Mental Health; Child Protection, examined:

Ms EMMA WHITE

Director General, examined:

Mrs PHILIPPA BEAMISH BURTON

Chief Finance Officer, examined:

Ms JULIE FAYE DIXON

Director Policy, Family Support and Reporting, examined:

Mr DAMIEN STEWART

Acting Executive Director, Community and Business Services, examined:

The CHAIR: On behalf of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I welcome you to today's hearing. Can the witnesses confirm that they have read, understood and signed a document headed "Information for Witnesses"?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: It is essential that all your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. It is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The hearing is being held in public although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question. Agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting the Parliament to review agency outcomes, and the committee values your assistance with this. Can I get an indication from members who would like to start asking questions? Hon Stephen Dawson.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Can I start off with page 18, "Aboriginal Services and Practice Framework". I am going to point to that and ask questions about Kinship Connections. Parliamentary secretary, if I can ask first of all, how much funding has been allocated for programs through Kinship Connections in this financial year but also the financial year that we are in?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Before we get started, Mr Chairman, I just wanted to check that the member had received all the answers to the questions prior to the hearing. I have a note here that he had asked some 12 questions.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thank you, parliamentary secretary, I did, and they were very helpful.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Excellent. In terms of the answer to the amount of funding on Kinship Connections, I might refer to the director general.

Ms White: Thank you. We are just seeing if we have that level of detail with us to provide that response. As Philippa looks, I say that in the previous financial year, we provided a seeding or support grant to Kinship Connections and it worked very closely with the director and their board to implement, in partnership, a range of operational arrangements in metropolitan districts to support Aboriginal children in care who were particularly disconnected from their family. We have done some evaluation of that. It has proven very successful for the small number of children and young

people that it assisted. We have extended the funding for another year and it is a larger amount. We are just trying to get you that figure.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: While you look for that figure, my understanding is that you have been providing some funding for the organisation itself and I think there is a separate pool of money that the organisation can seek to access to provide services that are requested by the department. Is that correct?

Ms White: Yes. There is a combination of grant, so they can establish and grow their organisation but on an individual child basis, if they have been engaged, let us say, for example, in Armadale, for a young person, we would also provide some additional financial support through our case support costs to do the level of work required. It is a bit case by case but we are also providing that grant money in a block, so to speak. We might need to take the dollar on notice. We are looking but we might not have it.

[Supplementary Information No A1.]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am particularly interested, director general, in whether there are two pools of money. There is the initial seed funding and it was my understanding that an amount of \$100 000 was put aside that the agency could access as part of their reconnecting families program or project. It was my understanding that for every case that DCP sent to the agency, they could then access \$5 000 of a \$100 000 amount. If you can clarify that, whether now or by way of supplementary too? It is my understanding, though, that only a limited number of cases were sent from DCPFS across to the agency. This is hearsay but I have you in front of me so I will ask you. It is my understanding that certain district officers had applied to send a case to Kinship Connections but head office had said, “No, there is no funding available.” I wanted to clarify whether there is funding available and somebody is saying no for whatever reason.

Ms White: It is hearsay from my point of view. There is certainly no blockage from a central point of view. We are really keen to support agencies like Kinship Connections. We see that as very much part of our “Aboriginal Services and Practice Framework” intent to grow not only partnerships operationally with Aboriginal community controlled agencies but, in fact, forge where possible service agreements in a more formalised way. We have been working to both Kinship Connections capacity and also we have been working within the department about understanding those referral pathways and when and who Kinship Connections could best benefit. You are quite correct in your assumption around being able to access a bucket of money as those individual cases get progressed. That is true. I will provide you by way of supplementary with the mechanics of that, if that is of interest. Like all children in care, we fund programs to support children and young people in care and their outcomes but we also have case support costs that the department is responsible for and manages around individual needs as they come up through a year. We have tried to make some of those funds available in flexible ways if it makes sense to that child’s need. That is probably the other part you have had some information on.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Probably by way of supplementary too, if you can provide to the committee how many requests for access to Kinship Connections services to find families of children in care were received in the last financial year.

Ms White: Yes; no problem.

[Supplementary Information No A2.]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I move on to page 11 of the report and “Workforce Overview”. I want to refer to some of that information that the parliamentary secretary mentioned a minute ago. In information provided to the pre-estimates hearing questions regarding vacant positions at 30 June, there were 84 vacancies and only 37 of those positions were being advertised. Why were only 37 being advertised?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I might defer that to the director general.

Ms White: In broad terms, we are particularly coming off a lengthy freeze. We have been focused on trying to fill those positions that most urgently need it. We have had an advertising process pumping out, as you are aware from some of the answers that we have provided, to try to get those positions filled. I think from today's date, there are substantially more than the 37. We are on a rolling program of trying to advertise and fill all those vacancies.

[9.40 am]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The latest data that I got was for 1 September. At that stage there were 99 positions vacant and only 31 of them were being advertised. It is a real concern to me that, firstly, there is a significant number of vacancies. Now, I know it is a difficult portfolio area and the staff work extremely hard and there is a high turnover rate, but the fact that two-thirds of the positions are not being advertised is a great concern. A notation to the response that I was given advised that vacancies not subject to advertising were being reviewed with regards to recruitment options and the operational requirements of the business unit. What does that statement mean?

Ms White: If I could draw us to the example of responsible parenting services. For example, we have a number of positions that are vacant—they have been vacant for some time—in the royalties for regions-funded aspect of responsible parenting. Given the changes in our budget with regard to responsible parenting, we have not sought to fill those positions, and certainly not in a permanent way. As you are aware, we have been reviewing all our FTE in the responsible parenting space, knowing that we have a transition period to a lower number of FTE. Some of those would be captured in that number. Some of the other impacts on that actual number are that some positions will have already gone through the advertising process and be in an appointments phase. Some are advertised and some have been advertised, they have been interviewed, offers have been made and we are still waiting for those people to take up that position, particularly in the regions. It can take anywhere between a month and four months to actually get someone in situ, particularly if they are moving their family, as you would appreciate. It is a moving feast, but some of the continuing reviewing is about aligning FTE resources and where the need is.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Okay. So this will not mean that staff will lose their jobs; it will just mean that the position that is in that area now may well be moved somewhere else.

Ms White: Yes. Definitely not; no staff are losing their jobs, as it were.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Okay. While I am on workforce overview, director general, I am aware that there has been discussion around the need for two new assistant directors general. Can you advise the committee as to the status of that project?

Ms White: Sure. Part of the suite of review and reform projects that we have been undertaking as a department in the last couple of years has really included quite a focus on our structures both from the tier 4—the corporate executive—through to the districts. There are 17 districts in the state. That is about aligning our effort and focus on our priorities, but also we have not reviewed the structure in about eight years, and of course we have substantively grown in size and complexity, we have more functions than we did and we have more legislative mandate than we did eight years ago. That is kind of the context in which I have been working with the Public Sector Commission to review what the corporate executive structure should be, not just to deliver on today's need but for the upcoming five and 10-year needs.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Have you received approval?

Ms White: No. That proposal is still in train. Obviously that is subject to all the regulation and assessment from the Public Sector Commission and Mercer and so on and so forth. The absolute boundaries we have taken to that piece of work are that it has to be within financial tolerance. So it might be an elevation to assistant directors general, but it might be that some of the other positions, as a result of that assessment, may actually come down a level, so we have been sticking to our financial settings, as it were.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: So there will be no extra money from Treasury?

Ms White: Not at this stage, no.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Chair, I have some other questions but I am happy to hand over.

Hon HELEN MORTON: To just follow up on the workforce issue, can you just give an overview of the general workforce outcomes for child protection and family services in WA in comparison to the other states? What I understand is that we have some of the best-staffed systems in child protection services. I just would like to hear whether that has been maintained.

Ms White: Sure. If this helps answer the question, I might talk to our staff workforce profile. Of course, what makes us so different from the other states and territories, besides, perhaps, the Northern Territory, is our sheer size and our regional profile. We have got about a third of our FTE or a third of our workforce out in regional WA. Unlike some of the other states and territories, we have, over time, located FTE in situ. For example, we have officers, as you know, from Kununurra, Wyndham and Halls Creek right through to Collie, Esperance and so on and so forth, so that really does set us apart. A lot of the other states and territories do mobile teams probably more frequently than us. I do not have the info right here, but I know that if we look at our retention rates, we have a turnover of just under 10 per cent per year. That is much higher than some of the other states on the east coast. About nine per cent of all of our workforce are people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. We are doing probably better in that respect than some of the other states, but these are challenges that all child protection jurisdictions have. About 35 per cent of all our child protection case-carrying positions are also in regional WA, in addition to that workforce profile.

Hon HELEN MORTON: And also caseload relative to staff in comparison.

Ms White: Sure. We have a workload management order as a result of industrial commission work some years ago that prescribes a caseload of 15, and under some circumstances to 18. We are the only jurisdiction in Australia that has that, and also more globally, I believe. That is something that the other states and territories often have a lot of questions about—they are very curious about how we manage that and what impact that has had on our workforce, workload management, staff satisfaction and so on and so forth. That is something quite different and specific to WA.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I go first to page 20, “Homelessness Services”. In the answers that you have already provided you gave us some information about the disruptive behaviour management strategy. You talked about there being 825 first and second-strikes cases during this reporting year. Can you give some more details about that first and second-strikes process?

Ms White: Certainly. We have an arrangement with the Housing Authority about when and how they will refer families to Child Protection. We have an understanding that we will be provided information on all of those first instances. They can range from —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: They are the first strikes?

Ms White: First strikes, yes. That can be anything from rent arrears to behaviours that they are getting a lot of complaints about—property damage and so on and so forth. We have a more prescribed process when it comes to the second notification or strike, where we, through our intake process, really assess what is happening for the family and in particular the impact on the children.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What is the difference between the department’s response from a first to a second strike?

Ms White: Particularly where there are children involved, at second strike it means that some of those issues are very much enduring and persistent. We become, I suppose, more concerned about the family and the children that the family have in the house or their own children about what might happen if these things persist. In a lot of the situations at that second strike, we already have a case management period open with the family.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So you would not initiate a case management process after a first strike?

Ms White: Not in all instances. We can, but not as part of the protocol. What that makes us do at that first strike is to check our own records—are we already working with the family, what has been our previous involvement, and have we had any other reports from any other avenues that would, I guess, help us understand what our role in that family needs to be?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am not expecting you to be able to answer this now, but would it be possible to give the committee information about the number of first strikes during this reporting year where there was either a case file already open or where you opened a case file as a result of a first strike?

[9.50 am]

Ms White: We can try.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Give it a go.

Ms White: I think we will find it is case by case on each individual file rather than aggregated data, but we can have a look. I do not feel confident.

[*Supplementary Information No A3.*]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You were describing what happens; how does that escalate at second strike?

Ms White: Again, it is a very similar process, but more prescribed in some of our guidance to staff around undertaking that initial inquiry process that we have prescribed under the act about understanding what the department's role is: are there children of concern; if so, what is the nature of that? We check our records in the same way I have described previously, and then we can, and often do, become involved in a more intensive way. When it is at that point, particularly where there are children, it is not just the housing issue at play, as you would well understand. So it might be around a parent support response, it might be actually more that we need to do a much more prescribed safety wellbeing assessment for those children. It might be us supporting through a warm referral to another service that can assist them. It can be a range of things. It does not always result in our intensive involvement, but it certainly can do.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You may not even open a case file after a second strike?

Ms White: No.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can you take that perhaps as part of that question as well and give me the data in relation to second strikes as well?

The CHAIR: We will add that to A3.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That will tell us how many families do not have a case file opened after the second strike.

Ms White: It might be of interest to the committee to note that sometimes we discover at first and second strike that there are other services quite involved in the family and, in fact, in the absence of concerns for children of a statutory nature, there are supports in play and there is not a lot of value we can add; but, sometimes there is.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What happens after the second strike?

Ms White: It is very much nuanced to the individual family and their scenario. From the department's experience, we have some families that, through some of that support or, in fact, the fact that they have had a second strike and they are housed, their homes are at great risk. That is enough to, I guess, precipitate some changes in the household. We have had grandmas, for example, or other adults in the household, actually do the very hard job of asking another adult, often their adult sons for example, to leave because, in fact, the disruptive behaviour is a result of an individual

in the home rather than the whole household. It can be that we need to provide a coordination service around that family of all the different agencies involved, because it is usually children are not going to the school, the property is not safe, the mental health of one or some of the adults in the house is not tracking in the way that they are not well; so, it could be a multi-agency integrated response to really try to enable and facilitate and walk alongside that family so they can, I guess, overcome some of the issues that are, in fact, leading to or contributing to some of the disruptive behaviour that has been alluded to formerly. It really depends.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Recognising that not all second-strike families will be being case-managed by your department, can you tell us how many of the ones that you are managing at second strike go on to be evicted?

Ms White: That is something we would have to take on notice. Again, it would be on an individual file.

[Supplementary Information No A4.]

Ms Dixon: It is definitely on the individual files. We do not keep that as aggregated information; that would be in individual case files.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: How do you manage the effectiveness of your intervention at second strike if you are not sure how many go on to be able to turn things around or face eviction?

Ms White: I guess, part of measuring success or not has to be done in combination with the Housing Authority and other services involved. We would measure an individual family in the sense of: have they achieved the outcomes, are the children safely with them, have they maintained the housing property. But in terms of the overall success of the program, the Housing Authority has the evaluation framework for that particular policy setting.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Do you have the statistics related to how many families or children—however you collect the data—have been evicted due to this disruptive behaviour management policy since it started, recognising that you might only be able to give us the data for the ones you are case managing?

Ms White: I could advise the committee that Housing collects that information, so they would be able to provide that.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Of the ones that Child Protection is case managing, would you have that data?

Ms White: At an individual file level rather than aggregated.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So you cannot give it to us?

Ms White: No. I guess an important sample would be the intensive family support homes pilot that has been underway for nearly two years. We have capacity for 10 families. We did some case-by-case analysis about 18 months ago about what size, look, feel such an intensive program should be, so we have allowed for 10. We have five families that, in fact, are homeless or have been homeless and have been part of the strike process that have entered that program. It is a Child Protection intervention, because it is housing in combination with all sorts of complex issues in that family—family domestic violence, drug and alcohol use, there is a lot of neglect of the children with regard to school attendance and so on and so forth. There have been 12 children as part of those five families, so that gives you a bit of an indication of the families that actually without that support would be homeless with all those particular issues that would, of course, mean that we would remain involved, and, in fact, the children would in high likelihood come into care.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can you tell us exactly what that program consists of?

Ms White: Certainly; it is a combination of support and responsibility for families.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Are they homeless when they come into the program?

Ms White: Yes, they are homeless; they are actively homeless. That is part of the criteria. They have to be open and prepared to commit to alcohol restrictive premises and income management. They have to be prepared to open their homes and lives to really intensive support—it is up to six hours a day in the home. That is generally provided by a fantastic Aboriginal intensive family support home coordinator who does a lot of the direct service delivery with the families, but also with our parent support program. They enter a 12-month lease.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So you find them a house?

Ms White: Yes. It is a joint partnership with the Department of Housing authority and also Noongar Mia Mia, which is the community-based housing authority that is the landlord, basically. But, of course, we have found, particularly because Noongar Mia Mia is an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation—their board, the leadership of Noongar Mia Mia have great links to the Aboriginal families in the homes—not always, but they have on most occasions, there is quite a lot of support both at the community and service levels. Also, to be frank, by design, the monitoring, surveillance and responsibility of the family is really quite high and it is very intensive. It is everything from get-out-of-school routines. It may be that these families are homeless. They are starting from scratch, so it is getting furniture, getting privacy and often moving to a different location. They are trying to re-establish connections in community. Kids are supported to re-enter school. They have often had long periods of time they have not been at school and all the barriers for particularly some of the younger adolescents who have to really navigate to come back to school. It is very much individually tailored to a family: to their composition, where they have been, where they are and where they want to go. If things have tracked well, they can keep the house and go onto a normal lease with the Housing Authority and we then tailor the support. It becomes less intensive, but we still remain involved until, hopefully, they are on their way.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So that program has a maximum capacity of 10 families?

Ms White: Yes; at this stage.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is that constrained by your resources or by the demand?

Ms White: It is probably a little bit of both. We have had the capacity for 10 families for some time now.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: But you have never had 10 families?

Ms White: Because of the strict criteria, I guess the focus we want is on the families that are homeless—their children are very much at risk, and in fact the family has to really be quite exposed and sign up to a great deal of public surveillance and accountability on their part—we have found that has been the number of demand so far. Word will get around—we are hoping. There is at least six months lead-in time for any individual family before they actually enter. That is mostly about lining up services and making sure, if they move to a particular location, that the school is happy to go on the journey with the family. There is a youth support service so that we can establish a relationship. There are a whole lot of things that happen before the family enters the home. It is quite substantial.

[10.00 am]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: How many families have you had to refuse admittance to the program because they could not comply with the conditions?

Ms White: We have not refused any; it is families opting in or out. It is still a pilot. We are evaluating it, so we will be able to bring some of that more granular detail in time, but it is more about willingness.

The CHAIR: Before you move on to another subject, Hon Helen Morton has another question on this matter.

Hon HELEN MORTON: You did not mention that these families have all been evicted under the three-strikes program. Is that still an essential criterion? It is not homeless people in the community who might be able to access this service; it is people, specifically, who come to the position of having been evicted. Is that still the case?

Ms White: That is still the case.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Just on that, too, I understand that it is still cheaper to provide that six hours intensive daily support to a family than to take those two kids—if there are two children—into care. Is that still the case?

Ms White: Yes, it is. The cost–benefit analysis is quite clear, and it will form part of our evaluation going forward.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Mr Chairman, just before you move on to another topic, during that session you took on notice supplementary information A4, but the answer that was provided by the witness was that that information cannot be provided. Is that still being taken on? That was the question from Hon Sally Talbot around how many second-strike families on case management ultimately get evicted, and the information was that it would have to be looked at on a case-by-case basis.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I think the director general said that it may be possible. I think there was a degree of uncertainty. I was just asking for it to be looked at.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So, are we taking that on notice?

The CHAIR: You are taking that on notice, but if there is difficulty or there is some reason why you cannot get it, then you can let us know.

Going to page 49, under “Other legal requirements”, you have a set of numbers there for expenditure on advertising, market research polling and direct mail. Can you give us a bit of an overview as to what matters were marketed or what the marketing is related to?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: This is on page 49?

The CHAIR: It is page 49, in the first column.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I am sorry; can you just repeat the question?

The CHAIR: What was the advertising and market research related to? What was the expenditure for?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The director general.

Ms White: Thank you. The majority of it is for advertising positions; it is basically recruitment. You will see LinkedIn in particular. We have found that that has really been a terrific development for the department. We have not quite seen the benefit of that with some of the disruption to the advertising process with freezes and so on, but we, like many areas of work, see it as the future. It is all online. It is very much part of our recruitment strategy and HR workforce development strategy.

The CHAIR: You are finding LinkedIn to be, say, more effective than some of the other job sites?

Ms White: Yes. So, for example, print media in the papers is something that we think is becoming more redundant. It is important for some positions; it is important for some print media, but certainly people are not reading *The West Australian* on Saturday in the same way as previously.

The CHAIR: Okay. Just turning to page 50, you have got misconduct allegations and proven actions. Can you explain to us some of the personal behaviour issues that were raised?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Mr Chairman, you will see that personal behaviour has a footnote (b), and there it indicates at page 50 that personal behaviour includes inappropriate physical contact, threatening behaviour and unprofessional conduct.

The CHAIR: All right. The next page shows that 17 of those were substantiated. What was the general disciplinary action that was taken?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Yes. I might ask the director general to answer that.

Ms White: I think it would be more accurate if I provide some of that detail by way of supplementary. I can talk in general terms, from previous trends in this particular misconduct area. Personal behaviour in particular often can be community members, other staff members, or other professionals around language that a staff member has used. It might be that someone has observed them to be in a work vehicle at what the reporter might consider to be a personal function, rather than a work function. Some of those result in affirming that and some of them result in dispelling that. We have a substantial residential care service, as you are well aware, and of course children and young people often, as we invite and hope, provide feedback about the conduct of staff. In the majority of situations, no misconduct has occurred, and on the occasional situation it might be that a particular person did raise their voice, and they need to be coached and supported to perhaps manage that differently. It is very, very broad. It can be computer use; it can be like many of the other public service departments.

The CHAIR: And the fraudulent and corrupt behaviour had eight allegations, although on the next page it shows nine, and one was substantiated. What was the nature of that fraudulent and corrupt behaviour?

Ms White: I have not got that level of detail with me; I am sorry. I will supply it by way of supplementary information.

[Supplementary Information No A5.]

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Also, Mr Chairman, are you asking to have clarified why one page states that eight allegations were received while the next page states that there were nine?

The CHAIR: That would be useful, thank you, parliamentary secretary.

Ms White: It is probably worth noting, too, that those sorts of matters would also be before the CCC.

The CHAIR: One last question I have refers to page 67, which shows the average cost per child involved in child protection cases. I see that that has been steadily going down. What is the reason why the cost per child is actually reducing—not that that is a bad thing?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It might be if kids are not getting the money and support.

Ms White: It is actually a bit misleading. As you know, we had a substantial change to our OBM structure—how we actually report against the services. We went from three outcomes to a much more detailed structure, as you will see on page—I beg your pardon; it is not in the annual report. Some of how we have recorded costs this time round actually takes in a smaller number of services, because the cost is reflected in the other outcome areas.

The CHAIR: Is that cost shifting?

Ms White: I think that the driver of changing the OBM structure was to bring more visibility and transparency to a level of detail that we had not had before. We saw it more as rather than putting money in three buckets, we put it in 14, so there is greater visibility, but it does, in terms of that trend, need some explanation.

The CHAIR: Since 2012 it has gone up a little bit, and then it has gone down again. So it is really an accounting measure more than an actual cost per child.

Ms White: Correct.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I refer the parliamentary secretary to pages 28 and 29. I want to ask some questions about safety and wellbeing assessments. Can I ask, first of all, what the difference is

between a safety and wellbeing assessment and a priority 1 safety and wellbeing assessment? Secondly, if you could just remind me, is there a mandated time line in which a safety and wellbeing assessment should be completed, and is there one for priority 1 SWAs as well?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I will refer that to the director general.

Ms White: Safety and wellbeing assessment is prescribed under our act, and it is the terminology for the activities the department undertakes to assess, as the name suggests, whether a child is safe and whether action needs to occur to prevent future harm. Priority 1 is a category to describe the urgency of action in relation to the information we have at hand that points to—what could be—harm having occurred to the child already, or in fact they are in quite a lot of danger of harm occurring again. It is part of our intake process where, based on information we have at hand, we determine what our plan is—what we need to do next, with whom and when. We have a 30-day time frame for safety and wellbeing assessments. Sometimes, safety and wellbeing assessments can be done very quickly depending on the features and nature of the case, and sometimes, they take a lot longer. Sometimes we actually act and do the work very quickly but we then, to write it up and get information from other sources—it might be Education or it might be other points of the system—that side of things or the back end of it actually takes a bit longer. But it is basically a child abuse investigation.

[10.10 am]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: So for priority 1, is there a time line?

Ms White: It is two days.

Ms Dixon: To begin.

Ms White: Two days to begin.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is two days to begin, but not a time line to complete it?

Ms White: It is the same time frame.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thirty days.

Ms White: Correct.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Could you, by way of supplementary information, provide information to the committee on the number of SWAs that took longer than 30 days in this financial year, 2015–16? That would be great.

[*Supplementary Information No A6.*]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Again on page 29 under “Action taken as a result of Safety and Wellbeing Assessment” there is a line that talks about “Action not possible”. In the total column, it has 884—I presume it is cases—when action was not possible. Can you explain to me what that means, please?

Ms White: Yes, sure. It is probably worth noting, too, that the 884 will not necessarily be the total number of cases; it could be the same family several times or the same children of concern several times. Typically, “Action not possible” is for families or children and young people that have left the jurisdiction, so they have gone east or north or north east. We, then, through our interstate liaison process, refer that matter through to that other jurisdiction. That is a key component. Sometimes, despite huge effort by not only Child Protection professionals but police and Health and others, we cannot locate the family so we might not be able to take action but the police continue, through their case management system, to try to locate the family. There are other instances where we have, through an assessment process, determined that no harm has occurred and the likelihood of harming or danger to that child is quite minimal. However, we would, through our recommendation, like to offer some support to that family or help refer them to parent/teen conflict service or something like that, but the family do not actually want to engage with us so we so we

have not been able to deliver on our next step of the plan, which is actually case closure, but we would recommend to that family that there are other supports that they may find of benefit. It really is quite a combination of things.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Do you keep track of the number of families that disappear; as in, they were there when the complaint was made but they are not there when you go to undertake a safety and wellbeing assessment?

Ms White: They would, in part, be captured by that number.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Do you have number specifically though?

Ms White: On that particular feature?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes.

Ms White: Only on a case-by-case basis.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Because 884 seems like a large number. It is almost eight per cent of the total.

Ms White: Yes. I think out of about 100 000 contacts we have a year, and as I said, it could be a family multiple times; we have a lot of families that come back and forth, back and forth over the border and in fact you will find that say, for example, in South Australia or the Northern Territory, they have very long and extensive periods of contact with the families. We have almost a “let them know if we come across them” arrangement because we know their home base is there.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Is there a formal process that takes place between you and the NT or South Australia?

Ms White: Yes, very much so. There is an interstate liaison protocol that all the states and territories are signed up for. There is also a subsection of that called the cross-borders protocol that really captures the Ngarrindjeri lands. We have NT, South Australia and WA because of the frequency of movement and in fact, families are wedded to that place rather than state, if that makes sense. It is reviewed really regularly that interstate protocol and it covers off on new work and children in care, because we all have different legislations. It is very, very detailed and it gets reviewed regularly at the DG’s forum and there is an interstate liaison working group that has been together for some years.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: While we are talking about interstate, can you provide the committee with information about how many children in care in Western Australia may well be located in another state?

Ms White: We can take that by supplementary information, yes.

[Supplementary Information No A7.]

The CHAIR: Just on that topic—if you do not mind, member—we had Education in yesterday and they said there was a number of families that, I cannot remember the term they used but they basically go off the grid and they cannot find them. Do you work with the education department to try to locate some of those families?

Ms White: Thank you. Yes, we do. Julie might want to add some detail to this in a moment. We have a rapid response protocol between all the state government departments about children in care. This is about prioritising and tracking them. A result of that protocol has been finding ways, over the years, of how to actually exchange data in a more regular sense. We used to, at a district level, sit there at the end of each term and go, “This is the worry list.” We would get on our system and go, “Okay; have we had any contact with these children or families?” to try to kind of match it up. That has become a bit more systematic over time so they will provide us the list, for example, of children who are off the radar. We will check that with ours. We may shed some light on some

situations and then not for others. For children in care, obviously, it is a very different proposition, us obviously having being the “parent” in law and responsible, so that is a different protocol altogether.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. Hon Stephen Dawson.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thanks very much. If I could move to page 15 and children in detention, I want to ask a question about children and young people in the CEO’s care who have been admitted to Banksia Hill. I understand from information provided to us in the pre-estimates hearing questions that there were 38 children in your care, director general, who were admitted to Banksia Hill last financial year. That seems like a big number. Is it? Can you explain to us, I guess, how this happens?

Ms White: Yes, look, I think one child is too many, as a starting point, absolutely. Thirty-five young people out of 4 500 is still a number we need to tackle. But, as you would appreciate, some of the children and young people that come into our care, particularly if they are older, come from incredibly troubled backgrounds. They have experienced acute and persistent trauma that does impact on their behaviours and that does often lead to criminal behaviour. They are often looking to belong. They are disconnected from family. Despite efforts in the out-of-home care community sector agencies and our efforts as a department, they are not settling that well and they are looking to their adolescent peers for that connection and belonging. But, of course, they also have a range of medical issues. As you would know, foetal alcohol syndrome does come into play and for that small number of young people, their lives have led them there and they are incumbent on us to keep supporting them to try to find a path but I think it is a challenge for a young person and a challenge for those around them to try to support them.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I do not think 35, though, is a small number. That is significant. People think, when we talk about bringing kids into care, that we are actually going to protect them. I guess maybe sending some people to Banksia Hill is protection but it does seem like a great number of kids who you are responsible for—or your agency is responsible for; I am not putting the blame on you—but it is called children in care of the CEO.

Ms White: No parent wants their child to go to Banksia Hill.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No.

Ms White: It is about 0.25 per cent of the total population. We take the view that one is too many but we also accept, because of the young peoples’ backgrounds and their life experiences, that they need a lot of really specific because there is a lot of child welfare emotional support-type issues but, by the same token, through antisocial behaviour they are often putting themselves and other Western Australian community members at risk or there is property damage and all sorts of situations, as you well know.

[10.20 am]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Do you have programs that you run to engage these young people in when they leave Banksia Hill? What happens? They are in there for a year or two years or whatever and they suddenly come back to your care. What do you do? How do you engage them? How do you stop them from going back to Banksia Hill?

Ms White: It is very much an individual young person’s perspective. They are in our care even when they are in Banksia Hill. We work really closely with Banksia Hill and other funded services about what can be mobilised to support them not only while they are in Banksia Hill, looking at their education and health and so on and so forth, but that re-entry into the community, and, particularly if they have got family carers and/or foster carers involved, maintaining that relationship, planning for where they are going to go, who is going to support them, are they going to have a juvenile justice officer and are they going to be mandated to undertake therapeutic training or other behavioural change programs through the court process. Often they are, and that is really

welcomed in some respects because it is part of that overall integrated support for that young person. We as a department fund services for young people who are at risk. Some children in care do access them. They can be therapeutic in nature; they can be more sort of re-engagement-type orientated, because we want them to find new peers and engage in different activities. If children and young people are in care, they are in Banksia Hill through our care planning process that you would be familiar with on the annual basis. That is all really tussled out.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Do those children who are in Banksia Hill retain the same caseworker as they had previously or does the case management move somewhere else in the office?

Ms White: Where possible, we try to maintain the same caseworker with children and young people in care, but that is not always possible. Staff leave; staff move. Those sorts of things do occur. We do have a worker—an FTE—that is generally based at the Children's Court and often knows the young people very well. She also spends a couple of days a week at Banksia Hill and is part of that coordinated integration, but they are young people in our care.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Just finally on this issue, does that number of 38 that you provided in the answer include children who were remanded at Banksia Hill or is this purely children who have been detained there for long periods?

Ms Dixon: It would be remanded and sentenced.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: With regard to family support services, the new early intervention and family support strategy has just been released. I know there were about 66 responses to the first document. Who was consulted on the second stage of the document?

Ms White: It was a range of further follow-up consultation processes. As you would see in the strategy, there are four main components, one of which is very much about how the department is reorientating our own resources to have a more focused effort in the early intervention and family support space. We have been undertaking a parallel process with our district staff about what that needs to look like, how the intensive family support team will operate, and when it will start. That has been quite intensive and going in an internal sense.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Just on that part of the process, with your district staff, were the staff actually consulted about that or was it at management level that those discussions were held?

Ms White: It actually started at a case level. We took a sample of cases—I think it was about 185—across the state and tracked and reviewed the life of a case from first contact, as it were, right through to the end to understand the journey of a case through the department. We then did an intensive 12-month consultation period with departmental staff. That took the form of written and meetings in person, coordinated through our central service delivery case practice unit. Of course, there were different parts of that district structural review, so depending on where you are in the structure, you might have more meetings than, say, if you were not being affected at all. It was really quite extensive and a lengthy process.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: You talked about reconfiguring some of the work that the department does. Does that mean that there will be a shift in resources from one program area to another program area to bolster this strategy or are there new funds to assist with the implementation?

Ms White: Currently, we do not have new funds as such, although we are working out what might obviously be required going forward. What we have done is we have started with what are the demand drivers. It is Aboriginal children and young people who are most at risk of coming into care. We have gone from a local deli, as it were, to an IGA to a Coles supermarket in terms of size and complexity. It is about working much smarter and in a more focused way about which families do we know if we do not provide some support and intervene the likelihood of their children coming into care is very high. We have looked at how do we combine what is already a very good suite of services in responsible parenting, Best Beginnings, and some of our child-centred family support casework. In fact, it is very rare that you do any kind of child protection assessment without

providing family support in some way at a time. What we have done is we have put teams together from existing resources that were already doing aspects of early intervention and family support. We have focused on and are building mechanisms so that they can share information so they know we are working with and targeting exactly the families most at risk of progressing in a negative way. Of course, outward looking, we are looking at how we can integrate not only those information-sharing processes to identify those families, but also service delivery around the individual needs of those families with other government and non-government agencies. Where there are family support networks in three of the locations in the metropolitan area, that will take a different form. It is very much about getting what we have already got and really signalling and focusing that intensive family support is a really critical safeguarding support for children and we think it will really help us turn the tide on the number of Aboriginal kids coming into care. Certainly, we will give it a red-hot go.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: So what you are saying is that you are refocusing the work of the staff who are already doing the work —

Ms White: Yes.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: — and their work will change as a result of that.

Ms White: Work focus, yes.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I have a lot more questions but I note the time.

The CHAIR: I will give the last question to Hon Helen Morton to finish off.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am interested in how the out-of-home-care reforms are going and the progress that you have achieved on that so far, if substantial or not.

Ms White: The out-of-home-care reforms and the implementation plan that we have detailed publicly and as part of the reform are all on track, so we are not delayed in any aspect of the implementation to date. We are just embarking on the needs assessment tool pilot, which is a substantial —

Hon HELEN MORTON: For the funding?

Ms White: For the funding. The needs assessment tool is about assessing the individual needs of children, so it is actually about the children and their needs. That will help inform and connect to what resources are required to support that young person and their carers to meet those needs. We are almost ready to publish our first result in the outcomes framework for children in care. That was a really key component of the strategy. We are doing a lot of work with the sector around service design and procurement processes that will take effect into next year. We have moved from relative carers and implemented family carers as the name that better describes children and young people who are actually living with and being raised by other family members. We have almost finished the work on the care team around the child, which is the next evolution of the foster care partnership agreement. As part of what I was referring to earlier under the district structural review, we are really getting ready to implement those new team structures that are very much part of the ongoing success and implementation of out-of-home-care reform. There is probably a lot more detail, but, in summary, we are on track and in tolerance with our proposed implementation strategy.

[10.30 am]

The CHAIR: We have time for one more question, Hon Stephen Dawson. Is there something you want to finish off on?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Where do I start? Director General, can I ask about a block of land in Port Hedland—the Morgunya block. It covers between Taplin and Meiklejohn Streets in Hedland. My understanding is that the land is vested in the Department for Child Protection and Family

Support. At the moment, Hedland Community Radio lives there. What is the status of that land and what are the plans for land?

Ms White: The current status is that the land and the current arrangements have been referred to the lands asset sale arm of the Department of Lands, so they are assessing the current state, future state and the process to get there. We are kind of in their hands really.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: So have you divested it to them or is it still on your books?

Ms White: No, it is still on our books, but in terms of where we go with this and how best to do that, we have referred that to the Department of Lands.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Did you refer this to them because they sought land sales from your department?

Ms White: Look, there are couple of drivers, and Philippa might jump across me.

Mrs Beamish Burton: It was identified as an under-utilised asset. It was just a piece of land that we had on our books and we did not have any intention of using.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Okay, so you identified it and told them?

Mrs Beamish Burton: Yes, we advised them and they are currently in the process of negotiating these issues.

The CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. The committee will forward the transcript of evidence, which highlights the questions taken on notice, together with any additional questions in writing after Monday, 7 November 2016. Responses to these questions will be requested within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. Should you be unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible beforehand. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. If members have any unasked questions, I ask them to submit these to the committee clerk at the close of the hearing. Once again, I thank you for your attendance today. I have a reminder to members that the deadline for submitting additional questions is 12.00 pm—noon—on Monday, 7 November 2016, as stated in paragraph 8.2 of the policy and procedures.

Hearing concluded at 10.32 am
