

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE (PAC)

**INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF NSW PUBLIC HOUSING
MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS**

At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney on Monday, 12 February 2018

The Committee met at 1:30 pm

PRESENT

Mr B. Notley-Smith (Chair)
Mr S. Bromhead
Mr L. Evans
Mr R. Park
Mr G. Piper
Mr M. Taylor (Deputy Chair)

PAUL VEVERS, Deputy Secretary, Southern and Western Cluster, Department of Family and Community Services, sworn and examined

ANNE SKEWES, Deputy Secretary, NSW Land and Housing Corporation, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Thank you for attending this public hearing being held as part of the Public Accounts Committee's follow-up of its inquiry into the management of New South Wales public housing maintenance contracts. By way of background, the Committee first reported on this inquiry in October 2016 and a Government response was provided in April of last year. At that time, the newly introduced contractual arrangements were not able to be fully evaluated due to their limited operational duration, and the Committee recommended that in addition to the usual Government response a progress report be provided 12 months after the tabling of the Committee's report. The Committee received this additional response in October.

In order to further satisfy ourselves that the new arrangements are meeting public expectations, the Committee has invited back representatives from the Department of Family and Community Services to elaborate on its progress report. I ask everybody to switch their mobile phones to silent. I now declare the hearing open and welcome back Ms Skewes and Mr Vevers to provide additional information. Thank you for appearing before the Committee today. Would either or both of you like to make an opening statement before the commencement of questions?

Ms SKEWES: Yes, I am very pleased to make an opening statement. I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and pay my respects to elders both past and present. I also extend that acknowledgement to any members of the Aboriginal community here today. The department welcomes the opportunity to address the Committee and provide feedback to the recommendations made in the progress report of October last year. I am delighted that my colleague Paul Vevers, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Family and Community Services, is also here to provide support.

We appreciate the ongoing interest of the Committee into the performance of public housing maintenance contracts. When we last appeared in front of you in May 2016, the asset maintenance services contract, or AMS as we call it, had only just commenced and we were working hard towards embedding a stronger and more responsive framework to tenant expectations. Now a year on, through working closely with stakeholders in our communities, we continue to receive more work requests through making it easier for tenants to report their maintenance concerns and we continue to see progressive improvements in our performance and from our contractors.

Our residents and the communities in which they reside are at the centre of the services we deliver, and for FACS it is very important that we continue to drive strong programs in auditing and compliance by our contractors, which has led us to gaining better value for money while we ensure that tenant satisfaction is at the centre of what we do. In fact, there has been a consistent improvement in performance from 83 per cent to 88 per cent since we last reported to the Committee in October. Under the previous contracts, one of the biggest challenges for us was that we were not getting the sort of performance outcomes we wanted. While jobs were getting done they were not always done in a timely manner nor to the satisfaction of the residents who requested the work.

Now we have an effective schedule of rates in place we have clear performance metrics and we understand the contractors' delivery chain. Most importantly, we are getting work done. Our performance and our contractors' performance has continued to improve significantly and tenant satisfaction is also significantly increasing. In my last appearance at this Committee I spoke to you about the 2016 announcement of the Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW strategy and the strong platform of reform that we have and that we are delivering on. Today we continue on that pathway, having commenced work on many of the Future Directions initiatives. The implementation of Future Directions has put an increased focus on tenant satisfaction and social outcomes, and with that I can report that FACS takes 1,000 tenant satisfaction surveys per week, with tenant satisfaction scores now exceeding well over 85 per cent and around about the 90 per cent mark, and that is tenant satisfaction on jobs performed on maintenance work.

We further worked to improve tenant satisfaction with our tradie pop-up sessions and we have had nearly 90 of those, and these have been held since the commencement of the contract. We have had nearly 4,000 tenants attend those tradie pop-ups—about 3,800—and we have raised over 9,000 work requests, and that, again, is an impressive amount of work. The satisfaction surveys are not just focused on the quality of the

maintenance we have undertaken; they also ask about the contractors' level of politeness, whether the contract showed their identification, and the general level of customer service as well as the performance through the contractor call centre.

Tenants are now better connected with their maintenance providers than ever before. If they are not happy with it, the complaints process is straightforward and tenants have a direct line of sight to how their concerns can be addressed. They know exactly who is going to contact them to fix the problem and the time frames around getting work done and also getting problems fixed. More importantly, as a department, we also have better performance metrics and we can better track the outcomes of our maintenance contract. To ensure that we are improving the social outcomes that we are committed to with the announcements of Future Directions, our contractors continue to improve on providing better social outcomes. So we are not just driving a better outcome around maintenance and performance on maintenance; we are also trying to drive some better social outcomes for our residents.

In our progress report in October we updated the Committee that as at July 2017 there were 560 apprentices and trainees participating in the delivery of maintenance services to public housing. I am pleased to come here today to let you know of the engagement of over 640 apprentices and, within that, 160 tenants through the maintenance contract. Aboriginal participation is also a key theme of the contract, and we continue to perform at about 3 per cent, against a Government target of 1.5 per cent. These priorities have been achieved by our contractors employing local people from the communities in which they live. Contractors know the local people, the issues and the local culture; strengthen FACS and NSW Land and Housing Corporation [LAHC] partnerships; focus on improving governance and accountability; work locally, streamlining our processes and putting better business processes and better transparency in place. We have also established robust escalation procedures across the various work streams that we have internally, reviewing our exchange guidelines how we work together and how we engage our staff in training and development.

The new maintenance contracts place a premium on performance management, so FACS has raised the bar in holding our maintenance contractors to account, with increased governance at operational and executive levels. Contract personnel are working side by side with FACS staff every day and every week to monitor and report progress on maintenance works. LAHC has a team of about 100 compliance officers who do compliance and auditing and undertake quality assurance to monitor the contractors' work quality to ensure appropriate levels of service is being given.

These officers are trained in compliance and audit, but are also qualified tradespeople, and they travel around the State to ensure contracts are up to standard. This is progressively driving improved value for money, as evidenced in the further improvement of works being delivered on time and to standard. In the report I think we noted that that metric was 80 per cent at the time of reporting. That metric has also gone up to 84 per cent as at the end of December. These rigorous auditing and compliance checks will continue, following the transfer of properties to the community housing providers, as they will be using the new contract until it expires in 2021. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement.

The CHAIR: With respect to the compliance officers and their inspections, what number of jobs get default notices?

Ms SKEWES: What numbers get default notices?

The CHAIR: Yes, or what is the percentage?

Ms SKEWES: I cannot give you the precise number of default notices, but effectively those compliance officers sample a set of works that have been done over a period of time. They look at categories of work. We effectively run an audit program across various streams and categories of work. When that leads to a non-conform notice it means there is an escalation pathway through the contract. So we have a series of steps within the contract where matters can be escalated.

Our primary purpose is to get jobs fixed and to get tenants happy. If it means sending contractors back to jobs or ensuring the right trades are there to do those jobs, our focus is on driving the outcomes for the residents and the tenants who requested the work in the first place. I can certainly provide you with some metrics, if you like, about the details around jobs not to standard. But, as you can see, our benchmark has increased, so timeliness and quality of work has tracked up from the 80 per cent that we reported previously to 84 per cent across all of the 700,000 work orders that we do in one year. That number is now up about 14 per cent in the last 12 months. So we are actually doing more maintenance work, now, than we have done before, through this new contract.

The CHAIR: What was that figure?

Ms SKEWES: There are 700,000 work orders a year. So, 700,000 jobs get done a year. That is a 14 per cent increase. I think that means that people are able to have their maintenance concerns raised. They are going through the contract call centre, speaking directly to the maintenance contractors themselves. As you can see from the tenant satisfaction levels—we call them up and do 1,000 surveys a week—the numbers are extraordinarily high. More than 90 per cent of people feel very happy with the work that has been done. There is a lot more volume of work going through the contract now than there was before. As I have said, our performance management regime and our tenant satisfaction metrics mean—I think we can be confident—that people are generally having a better experience of maintenance.

The CHAIR: If I were a tenant and the tiles were broken in the bathroom I would raise a work order. The contractor would come out and done the work. How do you get the feedback that it is all satisfactory?

Ms SKEWES: The request comes through to maintenance. The tenant would phone the 1800 number. The calls are answered within a three-minute metric. Performance against that metric has been very good. Those jobs are then assigned through the contractor call centre. The trades go out and the jobs are done. The tenants get a chance to rate their experience of that work independently on the tenant dashboard. They can see the dashboard on our website and record their experience.

In the exercise of the work being scoped we approve the scopes. The work comes through. We see, "Tile repair in bathroom," and our teams approve the scope. If the work is seen as being expensive—well above what we think that work should cost—we have qualified tradespeople who would make a judgement. Sometimes work gets re-scoped. We say, "It is too expensive; come back with a better price." Our people see the work and approve it. We then get feedback that the work has been completed. The contractor sends the communication that the work has been completed to standard.

We do samplings—for example, we look at all bathroom jobs or work that has been done by a contractor within that contract area. In addition to the scoping and the approval and proof of work being done we sweep across that with compliance and audit checks. We can do that randomly. At any time and any place we will send our teams out. If we have concerns about disability modifications or about roof repairs we will send our teams to any place in the State to check those.

I am also very pleased to tell the Committee that these are qualified tradespeople. We have a capability with the teams. They know, technically, what they are looking at. They understand costs and pricing and can make judgements about the quality of the work. So, no, we do not check every work order. We cannot possibly get out to 700,000, but we do have confirmation from the contractors that the work has been done. They have to assure us. If we go back to jobs and find that they have not been done we will have the work immediately rectified. We will send contractors back out. Our staff will accompany those contractors to make sure the work is done to satisfaction.

The CHAIR: I was not asking you whether they all go inspected. I was asking how you know the client is satisfied. You said that there is a web based dashboard.

Ms SKEWES: Yes.

The CHAIR: What percentage of clients use the dashboard to rate a job? Is there a paper alternative for those who do not have access to a computer?

Ms SKEWES: I thank you for the question. The dashboard is a relatively new concept. People are able to put their postcode in and do a rating—a star system. It is used by some. I do not have the metric around how many use it—the percentage of people who use it. In addition to the dashboard, for people who do not want to go into the web based system to provide feedback, with respect to all the jobs we make 1,000 phone calls a week independently. That is not the contractor. Out of the contracts call centre in FACS we make 1,000 calls a week to check whether the tenants were happy with the work that is being done.

In addition to that we require the contractors, when they finish a job—for example, when they finish the tiling—to be able to provide us with evidence that the tenant has said, at that very point, that the work has been completed and that they are happy. We have a number of checks. We have a check when the contractors complete the work on site with the tenant—the resident; we have the opportunity for an independent polling system, as we said, of 52,000 surveys a year; and then we have the online mechanism for those who would like to go directly to the dashboard.

Mr VEVERS: If I can add to that, clients or tenants are also able to call our client feedback unit, which operates every day of the week. They can do that either by phone or online. If they are not satisfied with the response they have got from the contractor, they can raise their individual circumstances and we then follow that up and give them a response back.

The CHAIR: Are there any smartphone applications you are thinking of where perhaps you could get the feedback? For instance, as soon as the job is done, a text is sent to the tenant's smartphone—assuming they have a smartphone—and asks them to rate the job. A person might sign the form to get the contractor out of their house because they cannot stand them any longer—in the worst case scenario. Signing off does not necessarily mean that the job has been you beaut, a person might not get one of those thousand phone calls, and if a person does not go onto the web portal there is no means of writing out their feedback—and who wants to get on the phone again? I know it is a lot of ifs—

Mr VEVEERS: Yes, we have been.

Ms SKEWES: It is a good suggestion.

The CHAIR: —but it would be positively engaging with tenants, taking a proactive approach.

Mr VEVEERS: We have not yet extended it to maintenance, but we have quite recently started doing large-scale SMS surveys to our tenants. Following our staff doing a visit to their property, we send them an SMS and ask them a very simple question: "Press 1 if you were satisfied, 2 if you were dissatisfied with the service that you received at your visit." We have a program of modernising our feedback in that way.

The CHAIR: Do they know that comes from you?

Ms SKEWES: Yes.

Mr RYAN PARK: I have a couple of questions about the head contractors. Of the five head contractors there, where do you get the most complaints? I understand there are different numbers of properties in each, but per 100 properties or whatever that they each have, who is dragging the chain here? This is something that often comes through the offices of many members of Parliament, as you would appreciate. I understand and am very comfortable with the statistics—they are certainly based on a great way of getting the evidence. Some are obviously doing it better than others. Who is doing it well and who is not? How are we making sure that those who are not are complying with those who are?

Ms SKEWES: That is an interesting question. Thank you for the question. As you have identified of our contractors, they all have quite different portfolios. In terms of their performance, for example, part of one of the very strong initiatives around this contract was also supporting regional New South Wales. So we have Joss, O'Donnell and Hanlon [ODH] and Lake Maintenance also supporting and working in those local communities. They are quite diverse property portfolios. We have just over 126,000 public housing properties in New South Wales. As you would appreciate, properties in the Riverina and the Central West that Joss might have are very different from properties that ODH might have up on the North Coast and in the New England area. That portfolio then is quite different to that of Broadspectrum, who have the large part of the metro area—the inner city housing.

Volume wise, Broadspectrum has a lot of properties in very dense locations. All of our contractors are now heading in the right direction on their metrics. They have all significantly improved. Particularly some of the regionally based contractors have been very strong performers from the word go. Those contractors work in local communities and they have set up contractor call centres employing local people. We are very confident about the performance of all of our contractors. We have regular meetings with them at all levels. Where there are performance issues—inevitably when you are doing 700,000 work orders, not everything is good and not everything is done properly—we have a very clear pathway under this contract where we escalate matters.

We can issue non-conformance notices. We can ask for performance improvement plans, and we have done that. Where a job is not being done adequately, we will issue a non-conformance notice and we can get performance improvement plans. Personally, I have oversighted some of those areas where we went in, we did a compliance audit and things were not done to our satisfaction. I can guarantee across all contractors we have the highest level engagement with their senior executive. I can pick up the phone to any one of them and get a matter attended to. They all take this contract very seriously and they are working very hard to achieve, in the main, all good outcomes.

I will not call out any particular contractor, because their performance has been strong and continues to be strong. This is not easy work. Sometimes it is quite challenging work, particularly in some areas, to get trades to do a job in a timely manner, but they are all doing very well. One of the things that we have with this contract is that the age of housing stock, the type of housing stock and the location of that stock are all very different right across the State. The issues are different in local communities. The concentration levels of public housing differ.

I am confident with this contract with the amount of performance management, with the engagement and with the partnering—and we have strong partnerships with these contractors. They will all turn their hand to

resolve a problem and deal with a matter to ensure that jobs are well done, contractors perform well, their subbies support the contract well and ultimately the tenants are very pleased with the work. The contract is absolutely heading in the right direction. We have been happy with all of our contractors over the term of the contract. Where there are issues, we are all engaged in resolving problems, from the most senior levels of these companies. I am pleased that we have that level of engagement.

Mr RYAN PARK: There are 600 apprentices employed in total. What is the value of the contracts in totality?

Ms SKEWES: The total value? We are spending about \$500 million a year on maintenance of public housing. There is a lot of money that is both our recurrent as well as our capital program. In the last several years, that number has been around \$500 million, so you can work out the metrics there. There is a lot of money. There are 700,000 work orders. There is a lot of work being done. The average age of public housing dwellings is about 37 years of age. The stock has been ageing. Clearly there are infrastructure issues on older properties. There are kitchen and bathroom repairs that are constant, there are roof replacements and there is a whole variety of planned work that we do. When we drive through the contract, we try to do that work in the most effective and efficient way. If you are working in a regional town and you need to replace bathrooms and kitchens, effectively you try to do job lots to be efficient with the contract. There is nearly \$500 million a year being spent on public housing maintenance.

Mr RYAN PARK: How many people would you estimate are employed as a result of that \$500 million spend? There are approximately 600 apprentices; how many people are there in total?

Ms SKEWES: In terms of the subcontractors and their service provider networks, I do not have that number and I could not do an estimate on that. The opportunity with the apprentices and traineeships has been a big thing for us. It is not just about maintenance; it is also driving opportunities for young people to get apprenticeships, which is terrific. There are the commitments that we have from our contractors, some through them directly employing people—for example, ODH in their call centre in Kempsey have employed local people and provided job opportunities, in some cases for social housing tenants. They have trained them up and given them a great chance to get some employment and develop their skills. So, we have driven out of this contract a real desire and we have great stories, terrific stories, of people, either social housing residents getting jobs and then being able to leverage those skills for further employment, as well as the chance for apprentices. I cannot give you the total volume in terms of the hearing today. I cannot give you the total volume of employment generation out of the contract but it would be a very big number.

Mr LEE EVANS: With half a billion dollars worth of expenditure for maintenance, is that capped or is that just the figure this year?

Ms SKEWES: We do have a budget. We work to the budget. The budget is around about \$500 million a year. It swings and roundabouts on that number. Effectively it is around about that number. Several years ago we increased the maintenance spend so we were doing more work. We do absolutely take our budgets very seriously. We do try and deliver on our budget. The program of expenditure is associated with what we call responsive maintenance. That is when a tenant will call the contractor call centre and want a job done. The other part of the maintenance program is what we call our planned work, our capital program. That is where we try to schedule the more substantial items such as the kitchen upgrade, the bathroom upgrade and the reroofing. That is the more substantial part of that program. Most of that work is fed out in tranches to ensure that it is done in a timely manner so we can achieve our budget targets. It is around about that number and there is some work committed where there might be a delay in a trade getting that work done. It is around about the \$500 million or just up to that mark.

The CHAIR: The tenant satisfaction rating of 88 per cent?

Ms SKEWES: It is actually over 90 per cent. The actual tenant satisfaction rating measure is around 80 per cent.

The CHAIR: How is that measure derived?

Ms SKEWES: As I indicated earlier, the tenant satisfaction measure is arrived at by sampling tenants who have had maintenance work done. That is people who are satisfied. They rang up, they requested maintenance work, they had a job done and they are happy with the job. That is arrived at by the 1,000 phone calls a week independently made. It is not the contractor calling. The contractors record the information as well, but this is independent polling.

The CHAIR: Who conducts it?

Ms SKEWES: It is conducted independently through the FACS Housing Services contact call centre. Mr Vevers and his team do that independently of the maintenance program.

The CHAIR: You run the surveys, Mr Vevers?

Mr VEVERS: Yes. We call 1,000 tenants, we ask them a range of questions such as were they satisfied with the work that was completed, was the contractor polite, did the contractor come when they said they would come—there are a range of questions that we ask.

The CHAIR: Did you design the survey?

Mr VEVERS: Together with Land and Housing Corporation, yes.

The CHAIR: I am concerned when it is operated in-house that the tendency is for those that are working for you to perhaps want to put the department in a good light.

Mr VEVERS: I do not think so, chairman. They have no vested interest. It is not their organisation that is carrying out the maintenance, it is a private company. The same staff will bear the brunt if there are complaints coming in from the companies, because those staff deal with the client feedback unit complaints as well. They are quite independent of the private contractors who are actually doing the work.

The CHAIR: Everybody gets the call who has had a maintenance work order?

Mr VEVERS: No. There are around about 13,000 repair jobs done a week and we sample 1,000 of those 13,000.

The CHAIR: The three-minute benchmark, how are you measuring that? There are computer applications which keep an eye on that. What is worst case scenario? How long are people kept waiting? You would have that information.

Mr VEVERS: There are two three-minute benchmarks, there is a three-minute benchmark for our client feedback unit and there is a three-minute benchmark for the contractors. For ourselves—that is when people are ringing up client feedback—I randomly monitor. Every single day of the week I get a random report that shows me what the call answering time is, as well as the normal call centre metrics that tell you what your average speed of answer is. I am not satisfied with average speeds of answer because you could be waiting 15 minutes and still have an average of three minutes. I randomly check at different parts of the day what the call answering time is. That is a very small number of the calls that come through to us. The big number are going through to the contractors.

Ms SKEWES: As Mr Vevers said, when tenants, residents, the contractor calls into the 1800 number there is a three-minute time frame where that call has to be answered. That has to be a genuine answer, not just answering and putting people on hold again. We have state of the art monitoring systems in those call centres to be able to monitor that. That benchmark is being achieved. In terms of outliers, there will inevitably be more complex issues, either residents who require more time on the phone to talk through a problem or clarification that is required. The contractors on those calls need to be able to ascertain what the nature of the trades is and the nature of the job that is being commissioned. We are achieving about 80 per cent on that three-minute benchmark.

In terms of outliers, there will be calls that take longer than that. We have that tracked through the contractors' call centre. We also have our contractors, if there are matters where there might have been a complaint from a tenant around how their request was dealt with through the call centre, we have the monitoring and we are able to go back and interrogate those calls. We can call material up, which we have from time to time through the contractors' call centre, to ascertain what actually occurred on that call and whether the matter was dealt with appropriately. That benchmark is consistently being achieved by all of our contractors.

Mr RYAN PARK: I have a success story that we could look at replicating. There is a service provider that provides women's refuges and other services called Supported Accommodation and Homelessness Services Shoalhaven Illawarra [SAHSSI]. They recently had a model whereby a Land and Housing Corporation employee is part of that team, they are embedded into their team. That person deals with some of the most vulnerable people in very difficult circumstances. The feedback that I have received directly and indirectly from clients and the organisation, who I have a lot to do with, has been exceptional. I wonder whether that type of model, particularly where some of us have large scale public housing areas—I have one at Bellambi, almost an entire suburb—whether or not we could do what I loosely call more outreach stuff at a local neighbourhood centre in a way that may head off problems a bit faster.

I find that sometimes when they have got to my office either they have had a bad experience and they have resorted to one of us or sometimes there is a breakdown in communication somewhere. Having seen this

person embedded at SAHSSI for clientele—that is very different, I accept that—whether we can try to do a little more what I loosely call outreach. That is probably not the term, but basing an employee or someone within a community where people go to. The local neighbour centre is an example for me, it could be anything in anyone's communities. I have found that seems to work and I wanted to tell you that today. I told SAHSSI I would say that.

I was also saying if there were other opportunities, because we know that some people do not find it comfortable dealing with government agencies, and right, wrong or indifferent that is the reality of it. However, they do find it a lot more comfortable if they are going to a neighbourhood centre to have a weekly community lunch, take the kids to the breakfast program—I am making it up; does not matter what it is—but they can engage with Housing then. I wonder whether for client satisfaction there is an opportunity to do a little bit more of that. I am speaking of communities where there are perhaps those large-scale precincts or areas. Mr Notley-Smith probably has them in his electorate as well.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr RYAN PARK: I open that up for discussion.

Mr VEVERS: I think that is a very helpful suggestion, it is something we are trying to do more of and can certainly specifically look at Bellambi. Both Ms Skewes and I know Bellambi very well.

Mr RYAN PARK: It is tough, I know.

Mr VEVERS: It has at times been a slightly troubled community.

Mr RYAN PARK: Yes, it has.

Mr VEVERS: We can certainly look at that. The other thing we have done in northern and western New South Wales is we have got a mobile unit in both of those locations. It is a Family and Community Services van equipped with computers, et cetera, so we can go out, park outside the local neighbourhood centres and encourage people to come in. There are three or four staff who go out with the mobile unit.

Mr RYAN PARK: That is terrific. I did not know that. I know—and I am sure other members of the Committee will also tell you—sometimes people do not want to come to your office, but they are much more comfortable if they see you at the local neighbourhood centre talking about these issues. I am trying to think of a way of breaking down the problems. Half of these problems when they reach us are as much about communication.

Mr VEVERS: Very much. Also, the pop-up maintenance sessions that Ms Skewes is talking about, we try and get Housing staff there as well, because people may come with a maintenance problem but actually it is a neighbour dispute or they think someone is dealing in drugs. That is very useful intelligence for us to be able to get that.

Ms SKEWES: The pop-ups is probably our big story on maintenance really in the last 12 months, changing that whole focus of going out to people rather than just waiting on the complaints line for people to call in. We have done some great things and I know many of you know these pop-ups well and we have got various styles of pop-ups. Mr Vevers and his team fully support those pop-ups. We have had fabulous pop-ups where we have integrated service delivery. They are as much as possible designed to be non-threatening. You could have a maintenance issue dealt with, at the same time you can go off and talk to someone quietly about another issue you might have or you might know of it in relation to a neighbour. All of that outreach, as you describe it, is really fabulous work. Places like Bellambi, as we know, over time have been the subject of quite intensive—old-fashioned word—community development type programs. Those sorts of things. We are very committed to that style of work in FACS. It works incredibly well.

Just as another example I can give the Committee in addition to the pop-ups is what we do at Waterloo. You gave me the earlier question about who is performing well. You have different places, different contractors, different mix of housing. We have some terrific things at Waterloo Connect, which is a little neighbourhood centre in the Waterloo estate. We have our maintenance people dropping in. We have done get-togethers in the community room where we make sure Broadspectrum are out there. Some of the tradies come on the day, they might have a washing machine or a fridge with them. Real-time if things can be done and jobs can be done they are on site. It just is a fabulous outcome.

As we know in our own homes, there is nothing like getting the repair job done now as opposed to waiting and programming that in, in a week's time. The pop-ups are all about that. They are about outreach and they are bringing the trades closer to our residents, but also, as Mr Vevers said, that whole thing around making it more accessible for people. We know that is the style of work. If you come and deal with a maintenance issue

and there might be some other family support we can offer in relation to another issue, that is the joined up part of FACS that we are very committed to. That is the style of work that is occurring, as Mr Vevers said, opportunities to get out into local communities, get involved with people and be closer, both to their maintenance issues as well as other services that we can support them with.

Just on that theme—and I will go to this now—the Committee has referred to another innovation of ours; the MP enquiry line. We know that a lot of times there can be complaints coming forward to ministerial offices. Often things have escalated for someone to raise them to that point, for whatever reason. We have a process where we are able to monitor that. We have a separate number for a MP enquiry line. We have encouraged local members of Parliament [MP] offices to come forward through the MP enquiry line to refer matters through to us. Those calls come directly in, they are not going into the contractor call centre immediately. The MP enquiry line is coming directly to our head office at Ashfield. We have a small team who monitor those matters. As I said, we try and move those through the system very quickly.

We deal directly with our contractors in relation to those matters and we have some very senior staff involved in monitoring those issues until their completion. We are also able to then respond back to MP's offices with the information about either the matter has been resolved or where the matter is up to and help with the communication process. That has been an innovation, I guess in the last eight months or so, just getting that mechanism working better. For me that is driving much better resident and tenant outcomes, having an MP enquiry line that means we can go to the heart of the matter very quickly and stop the process of escalation, stop the issue of complaints management that comes into the system and the other side. They are all the things I think the Committee has referred to about us just reaching out and being more proactive. That is the way we are thinking about our whole experience around maintenance as we move forward.

The CHAIR: Apart from the pop-ups, can you tell me about what sort of engagement you have on the ground in those communities?

Ms SKEWES: I gave the Waterloo example. I have some fabulous staff at Waterloo and their job is to basically walk around, engage with the neighbourhood advisory groups and the tenant representatives on that site and be available 24/7—because they are 24/7, they can be called any time of the day or night. They are the point of contact for that community if there are maintenance issues. That is a very physical, on the ground presence. We found with the concentration of public housing, the maintenance issues, the need to be present in that community, very good and strong networks in that community around the tenant advisory groups and those organisations. We have staff walking around fixing things, calling the call centre, responding to tenant issues and it is fabulous work and it is well supported.

The CHAIR: No doubt there is a great need for it in the Waterloo estate.

Ms SKEWES: Yes.

The CHAIR: What about those estates which are less challenging, let us say the Elphinstone Road estate in my electorate?

Mr VEVERS: We fund eight non-government organisations—deliberately we fund them rather than do it ourselves—to seek to build tenant representation. As we know from experience, if we can get a tenant body together we are going to get better consultation and better feedback about the range of issues which need to be addressed. Whilst, of course, we visit our tenants at regular intervals, you only pick up what is relevant to the individual tenant that you are visiting. Those eight organisations work across the State, and we have more than 100 tenant groups which exist. Sometimes they are very small. We have eight or nine people in our two estates in Taree where it is a small tenant group. In Waterloo we have a full-scale neighbourhood advisory board with a secretary and so on. We are very, very keen to encourage that. We are about to retender those contracts and to reinvigorate them because we would like to see more than the 100 groups that we have got.

The CHAIR: What sort of KPIs have you got in the tender?

Mr VEVERS: It is hard to get numeric KPIs other than numbers of groups and numbers of tenants who attend those groups. We do get that but we are keen to see new groups form in places where we have not had them to date, because we have got some quite significant regional public housing areas where you might have 400 or 500 people. In Orange, for example, we have three quite large estates so we do not have a tenant representative group in all of those. The KPIs for the organisations will be to get a more structured tenant representation in areas where we do not currently have it.

The CHAIR: Going back to the survey, they are very good results that you have reported such as customer satisfaction. Have you had the survey looked at scientifically by people who do that for a living to find out if you are asking the right questions and getting a clear response? In politics, pollsters know exactly how to

get the granular answers by specifically designing the questions. They know what you think even if you do not know.

Mr VEVEERS: I would be very happy to make a commitment that we will have someone external from a market research company to look at the questions that we are asking. We have done that from time to time. We use our housing contact centre for numerous types of surveys. We do surveys on people's level of fear of crime and antisocial behaviour. In those cases, we are using BOCSAR from the Department of Justice to advise us on that. I am happy to give the Committee a commitment that we will get a market research firm to look at the questions we are asking and make sure we are phrasing those questions in a way that is appropriate.

The CHAIR: That is excellent. Perhaps also to look at how you are interpreting the results. I will give you a quick anecdote on street sweeping when I was mayor. The general manager said, "Mr Mayor, we have swept every street", but sweeping a street does not mean a clean street because cars are parked along the street and it has nil effect even though the truck drives down it once a week. There are statistics and statistics. I would like to be comfortable that you are getting the correct interpretation of the data that you are collecting and collecting the data in a scientific manner.

Ms SKEWES: Absolutely.

Mr VEVEERS: We will do that.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing before us today. The Committee may have a few more questions. We will send those to you in writing, the replies to which will form part of your evidence and be made public. Would you be happy to provide a written reply in five days to any further questions?

Mr VEVEERS: Yes.

Ms SKEWES: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: That concludes the public hearing. I thank the witnesses who appeared today, my Committee members, staff and Hansard.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee adjourned at 2.24 p.m.