

INQUIRY INTO NSW GOVERNMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

DPC responses to Questions on Notice – 23 September 2021

Question 1 – Energy Account Payment Assistance vouchers

The CHAIR: Ms Wilkie, will you take on notice what, if any, assistance is being provided to individual households by the New South Wales Government to deal with utility bills?

Ms WILKIE: Yes, I can take that on notice. Again, payments to individuals are not the responsibility of the Treasury portfolio area. We deal with business support. But I will take that on notice for you.

The CHAIR: Then I will ask Ms Luschwitz to take it on notice on the part of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Could you pay particular attention to whether or not there has been any promotion of the New South Wales Government's Energy Account Payment Assistance vouchers and what support has been provided under that voucher scheme since mid-June?

Ms LUSCHWITZ: I can take that on notice, Chair, but I would refer—your original question was in relation to broad supports. The nsw.gov.au website has a page which lists all the support services provided to individuals. There are hardship payments available. There are test, trace and isolate payments available. There is a number, not just for south-western Sydney but, in particular, western Sydney—supports go beyond financial supports but, indeed, mental health supports. Obviously there are a lot of agencies that are working based on the needs of different communities. Multicultural NSW continues to lead on specific community needs within, in particular, south-western Sydney. Aboriginal Affairs NSW has been working in western New South Wales—sorry, Chair, was that not what—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Ms Luschwitz, I was asking for how much has been paid to individuals. Are you able to provide us with a figure?

Ms LUSCHWITZ: I am unable to provide that but I am happy to take that on notice.

Answer

The NSW Government offers six energy rebates including the Low Income Household Rebate, Gas Rebate, Life Support Rebate, Medical Energy Rebate, Family Energy Rebate and Seniors Energy Rebate to provide ongoing support to vulnerable customers experiencing difficulty paying their energy bills. The NSW Government also offers the Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) scheme to provide short-term financial assistance to customers experiencing difficulty paying their energy bills due to an emergency or crisis.

The NSW Government has promoted EAPA vouchers, including the two increases to the EAPA transaction limits from \$300 to \$400 to support customers impacted by COVID-19 in 2020 and in 2021. Between 14 June 2021 to 30 September 2021, EAPA Providers have delivered \$5,114,700 in EAPA vouchers to 17,959 NSW households.

Question 2 – The 70% reopening date

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: My question is, who is in charge in the New South Wales Government of conducting that modelling about that all-important date about when things might open? Who is the agency in charge?

Ms LUSCHWITZ: I guess I would say that, again, with Commonwealth responsibility for supply, that is one of the inputs. NSW Health are obviously intrinsic to some of the delivery in relation to that, and I would say that they are best placed to provide information in relation to the modelling in relation to when we would hear the—[disorder].

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you for that answer. If you could perhaps take on notice the agency arrangements about that modelling as this continues.

Answer

NSW has achieved its 70% double dose benchmark. NSW Health provides daily vaccination updates, and the Australian Government is responsible for vaccination data and reporting.

Question 3 – DPC’s involvement in the WestInvest Fund

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you for that answer. Turning to that Westinvest Fund, it has been six months in development, according to the Treasurer—and I thank my colleague for pointing out that Herald article a day after it was announced. Was DPC involved in the six-month development of this Westinvest scheme, which so far is just six dot points on a press release?

Ms LUSCHWITZ: I cannot speak in my role as Acting Deputy Secretary for the Transformation Group in relation to my engagement. But, indeed, with Minister Ayres being supported more broadly by DPC and in particular by Investment NSW, I can take on notice in terms of where in DPC that engagement could have occurred.

Answer

This is a matter for NSW Treasury. DPC and Investment NSW have not been involved in the development of the WestInvest Fund.

Question 4 – Governance arrangements for the WestInvest Fund

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If you could take that on notice, that would be very welcome. Could you also take on notice who are the Ministers, given the problems we have had with grants under this Government, who will have final decision-making authority for each of these areas that are covered by this fund?

Ms LUSCHWITZ: Sure. I think that was already taken on notice in relation to a question from the Chair around ministerial responsibility for the fund. So, again, I can confirm that question will be taken on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is a slightly more specific question, given that we have found that the Ministers who are responsible for administering are not always the final decision-makers for the fund. So, if it could be taken on notice as a separate question?

Ms LUSCHWITZ: Thank you. Yes.

Answer

This is a matter for NSW Treasury.