

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 2

Monday 31 August 2015

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES, SOCIAL HOUSING

UNCORRECTED PROOF

The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. G. J. Donnelly (Chair)

The Hon. S. Cotsis
The Hon. M. Faruqi
The Hon. P. Green (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. M. R. Mason-Cox

The Hon. Dr P. Phelps
The Hon. P. Sharpe
Mr. D. Shoebridge
The Hon. B. Taylor

PRESENT

The Hon. Brad Hazzard, *Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Social Housing*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:

**Budget Estimates secretariat
Room 812
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2015-16. Before I commence I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the official custodians of the land. I also pay respect to elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present here today.

I welcome Mr Hazzard and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Family and Community Services, and Social Housing. Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. A transcript of today's hearing will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, while members of the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I remind media representatives that you must take responsibility for what you publish about the Committee's proceedings.

It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside their evidence at this hearing. I therefore urge witnesses to be careful about any comments you make to the media or others after you complete your evidence here this morning as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take an action for defamation. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat.

There may be some questions that a witness could only answer if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In those circumstances, witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any messages from advisers or members' staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber and support staff of the Committee secretariat. Minister, I remind you and the other officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated behind you. A transcript of this hearing will be available on the website from tomorrow morning. I remind people to turn off their mobile phones for the duration of the hearing.

We will move to the swearing of witnesses. All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath of office as a member of Parliament.

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

MICHAEL COUTTS-TROTTER, Secretary, Department of Family and Community Services, and

SHANE HAMILTON, Chief Executive, Aboriginal Housing Office, sworn and examined:

MAREE WALK, Deputy Secretary, Programs and Service Design, Department of Family and Community Services,

DEIDRE MULKERIN, Deputy Secretary, Western Cluster, Department of Family and Community Services, and

ANNE SKEWES, Deputy Secretary, Land and Housing Corporation, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Just to confirm, it has been agreed that the Government members will not be asking questions, so the questions will be asked rotating from the Opposition to the crossbench in 20-minute blocks. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Family and Community Services, and Social Housing open for examination. As there is no provision for a Minister to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questioning we will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, can you confirm that the Government plans to reduce the Department of Family and Community Services budget by \$70 million per year from 2016?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The budget for Family and Community Services [FACS] is \$6.1 billion and my intent is to continue to ensure that the budget is sufficient to meet all the needs of both child protection and out-of-home care. Of course, you would appreciate that the entire FACS now is one FACS: it covers public housing—social housing, as you would call it—and a range of other services; so the various public servants come together, 20,000 people. There will be budget savings; those budget savings, of course, are efficiencies but that does not mean that the services will be reduced. We intend to ensure that the services to children in out-of-home care, children who are in need of protection, those who are homeless, those who require social housing, will be addressed. So the bottom line is that there will be more than sufficient funds to ensure that. But, of course, if there do need to be more funds I will happily argue—as I did this year—for additional funds out of Treasury.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I just want to know whether you can confirm that \$70 million figure.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am not confirming anything at this point except the fact that the budget that we have will be more than adequate to meet the various needs because I, as the Minister, will ensure that and I will continue to argue with Treasury. This year we had an increase of \$200 million over four years and I anticipate that as the efficiencies of the services proceed, that may or may not be necessary to get additional funds, but we will work through those issues as the need arises.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So you are not confirming the \$70 million—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have answered the question.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I was only halfway through the question. So you are not confirming the \$70 million at this point. Can you explain to the Committee the numbers in terms of staff reductions that will flow as a result of the efficiency savings, which may or may not, according to you, be \$70 million?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The department will have adequate staff to do the job. We now have, since the dark days of Labor, the lowest rate of vacancies, for example, with caseworkers dealing with child protection issues—in fact, far less vacancies than were under your lot, and this Government has ensured that there are more—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Thank you, Minister. The questions are very specific. I do not have a lot of time to ask them. I just want you to confirm how many jobs will be lost as a result of this cut of \$70 million, starting next year.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Well, that is your hypothesis, on \$70 million and I have answered the question.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Then I need to direct you to a document which I hope you are aware of, called, "Changing the Way We Work". It was released in December 2014. If I may quote from that document—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Hang on. Let's not play these games. If you want me to refer to specific documents, you produce a copy for me to look at and you verify the copy or I will not be responding.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am very happy to do that.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Produce the document

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: We will bring it to you in one minute. I can probably give you a copy right now, if you really need one, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You are the one with short time you said, so you make sure you have an efficiency about producing—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: If you are not aware of your own documents that is not my problem.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am happy to provide that to the Minister if he needs it.

CHAIR: A question is being asked of you, Minister.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You have the document in front of you. I will read it to you—December 2014:

Fiscal sustainability. By July 2016, FACS must save \$70 million each year,

...

Savings are allocated across the NSW Government and FACS is no exception.

...

The majority of these savings will come from staff reductions in the central part of FACS where we need to be 30 per cent smaller.

So do you now confirm, Minister, that there is a \$70 million savings—that is, cut—to the department, starting from July 2016?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What I confirmed to you was that there will be efficiencies, as there are right across the board in government. Unfortunately, when you people were in government the budget blew out.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, when we were in government we injected \$1 billion cleaning up the mess that you had left previously. I will leave it at that, I just want you to confirm whether this document is correct and that there is a \$70 million cut.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: All I will confirm is that I will, as Minister, ensure that there are adequate funds to do the job that Family and Community Services needs to do, and we are doing it far better than you. I remind you that the extra funds that came under Bob Carr came when I was shadow Minister and I highlighted the shortcomings of your management of the Department of Community Services [DOCS] at that time. Those funds were thrown into—

CHAIR: Order! Minister—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I can answer the question any way I like, Mr Chairman. I am answering it.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You can answer the question. We are asking you to confirm whether this document is correct, whether the \$70 million is correct, and how many staff are being lost in your department, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will finish answering. I was about to say that you people put in extra money but you did not address the fundamental problems within the structure of the agency.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, with respect, you have now been in government for five years—five years. It is late to be talking about the previous Government when your own document here says the \$70 million—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: So you acknowledge your incompetence?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Some \$1 billion was injected into your department. A \$70 million cut—how many staff are going? It is not unreasonable for this Committee to be asking that question. That is what estimates are for.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: In the fullness of time, we will be able to address those issues. But I can tell you right now that there have been no cutbacks to frontline staff—in fact, frontline staff have increased. But there certainly will be efficiencies and so far those efficiencies have aimed to deal with backroom senior management and backroom staff, not frontline staff. So I see no reason for you to get on your high hobbyhorse when, in fact, we are ensuring that we are dealing with far more children in out-of-home care, far more children in terms of child protection than you people ever did. That is not to say that we are doing it perfectly because, you know what? There is a lot more work to do, and I intend to make sure we do it.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Thank you, Minister. So you are unable to confirm how many staff will be lost from Family and Community Services [FACS] as a result of this cut?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I just confirmed to you that there will be no frontline cuts.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is not what I am asking, Minister. I understand the difference.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You are becoming rather tedious.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: If I could get an answer from you perhaps we could move on.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You have had my answer.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: If you are not going to provide the answer to this Committee, which is asking a legitimate question about how many staff in the Department of Family and Community Services are going to be lost as a result of your Government's decision to cut the department by \$70 million—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The frontline staff who are required to give the services that are required, Ms Sharpe, will be there and I would anticipate there will be more frontline staff as we go through reorganising the various sections of OneFACS to make sure that OneFACS provides efficient services, as it should.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: More frontline staff? Can you outline to the Committee how many more frontline staff there will be as a result of this review then?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I just said to you that as we progress, we will ensure there are adequate staff and, if necessary, I will ensure there are more frontline staff.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You are saying to the Committee that you are going to cut staff but somehow there is going to be more frontline staff? This is sounding like a magic pudding.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, Ms Sharpe, I will cut people who are in the back office who are management, not doing the frontline work, if I need to make those efficiencies, which I will need to do. And I will make those cuts but I will not be permitting any cutbacks of the people who provide the services that we need.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, I think that is the question and it is not a difficult one: How many of those staff do you think you are going to be cutting?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You will get your time. It is not a difficult question but the Minister is not going to give an answer.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: These are Labor questions, so control yourself.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: We might come back to this but this document suggests that you might have 30 per cent fewer staff. Can you guarantee that of the staff positions for people who are in central office who deal with the screening and monitoring of foster carers no jobs will be lost?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Sorry, could you repeat that question?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Given that you will not confirm this but your own documents say that there is going to be a reduction by 30 per cent of the staff within FACS, my question is about those staff that are responsible for the screening and monitoring of foster carers. Can you guarantee that, in your cuts, none of these staff will be lost?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Ms Sharpe, you are showing an incredibly astute capacity to read the documents. Perhaps you might like to read the whole of the third line of the paragraph from which you are reading—out loud.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You do not get to ask the questions, Minister; that is what we are here to do. I am now asking you about foster carers.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: If you do not have the literary skills to be able to do that—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: If you want to be patronising and rude—this is a straightforward question.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Let me put it this way for you: There have been 340 allegations of abuse by foster carers investigated by FACS in 2013-14, with 173 of these carers already having previous allegations of abuse against them. My question is: If you are cutting staff in the department, can you guarantee that you are going to have more, rather than less, staff working to screen and monitor foster carers? It is not acceptable that there are kids placed in foster care where there are risk of harm reports against those foster carers. That is what I am getting to, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: On that last point, I totally agree with you.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Good. Are you going to make sure there are no staff cuts?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: As I said, if you read the entire sentence, which you have embarked upon without seriously acknowledging that you are playing with the truth—

CHAIR: Order! The Minister will come to order!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What is the problem?

CHAIR: Your gratuitous statement Minister about the matter of truth.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, we have moved on and I am asking you about foster care. Either you are going to guarantee that there are sufficient staff—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: The Hon. Penny Sharpe has asked a question; the Minister was in the process of answering that question before he stopped.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: He was in the process of arguing.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: He is in the process of sledging.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: The Minister should be allowed to answer the question.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: He is smashing you out of the park. Try harder.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: There was a question asked. The Minister should be able to respond to it without interjection.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Mr Chair, can I just say that, unless there is a point of order taken, I am not sure you should be interfering either when I am trying to answer the question.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Why do you not run the Committee, Minister? That would be great. Sit up here and run the Committee or answer some questions.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There is a way to run the Committee and a way not to run the Committee. I have been around long enough to know how it should be run and this is not the way it should be run. Secondly, if we can go back to the substantive question, as I was about to say before I was so rudely interfered with, the majority of these savings will come from staff reductions in the central parts of FACS.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes, which I have not contested at one point, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Well, I have stated that now four or five times in different ways.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Because you cannot hear. Now I am asking about the staff centrally.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I beg your pardon? Say it again?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: If you have difficulty hearing, Minister, I am unable to help you. I am being very clear: I am asking you about the staff who are screening and monitoring foster carers. Will you guarantee that there will be no loss there?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I can tell you my view is that there should be as many staff as is possibly necessary, and more if we can do it, to ensure that every child—every child—in New South Wales has a very safe environment, whether they are at home—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So you are not guaranteeing that there is going to be the same level of staff screening and monitoring foster carers?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What I will say is that I want to make sure that there are more than enough people at the front line of FACS to ensure that children are kept safe.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, I remind you of something you said in June this year—this is in response to the issue of 340 allegations of abuse by foster carers, with 173 of these carers having previous allegations of abuse against them. This is what you committed to doing:

I have indicated to the Department that those ones I want reviewed and I want to understand exactly what has gone on and I want to make changes, if changes are necessary.

Can you tell the Committee what has happened as a result of this inquiry and this review?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Sure. First of all, that was a report that was on channel 7. I have the greatest respect for that particular journalist, who I think does an excellent job and anything he can do to highlight shortcomings in any area of child protection I will happily engage with him and listen to, because I want to make sure that children are protected—in every manner, shape or form. Having said that, unfortunately the reports on that appeared on channel 7 were erroneous. I think perhaps there was misunderstanding as to the term "carer". The reports that were made in relation to the risk of serious harm reports actually covered all carers, not just foster carers.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, you have an opportunity to clean up misreporting if you believe it has been happening.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I just did.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes. I want to know what has happened as a result of the inquiry you said you were going to do—the review of the cases. What is being done to ensure that the most vulnerable children in New South Wales are not being placed with foster carers where it is not safe for them to be placed?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have worked extensively with the department and obviously the Children's Guardian, the Ombudsman—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Has there been a review?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There has been a review.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: What is the outcome of the review?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: They are still working through those numbers; they are quite complex.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: What is the time frame for that review being completed?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: They have not actually given me a specific time because it is quite complex to look at each individual child, as you would appreciate.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I ask Mr Coutts-Trotter: Can you give us a time frame?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, I will answer the questions.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: The answer is right next to you, Minister, so you could probably get him to whisper in your ear or give you a post-it note. That would be useful.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You can have the whispers in your ears; you can have the post-it notes. I am saying that in the fullness of time, when the officers have been able to investigate all aspects of that, then certainly I will be making some public statement on that. But I can say that the first cause of concern was that, unfortunately, the information they were given was not entirely accurate. Now that is not to detract—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, I again say to you, if you have a problem with the reporting there are channels to do that. This Committee is not one of those. On behalf of the people of New South Wales, we are seeking through this process—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You asked the question. I answered it.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes. What is the time frame for the inquiry?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will hopefully have the answer as soon as I can possibly get it. When I know that, when the officers have completed their investigations, I will let you know. But there were issues because the reports that were made on channel 7 were not accurate.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am sure the review will pick that up if that is the case.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: And that is what I just said.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: And I want to know when that is. Minister, will you guarantee that not one less child will be assessed after these cuts are in place?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Which cuts are you talking about?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: The cuts that you continually say are not there, but your documents tell us are \$70 million.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have answered all that. I have been through that. I am not going back over that. Give me something new, for heaven's sake.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I can ask you whatever question I want.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: In that case, I can answer it.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I do not think that asking—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not know what you do in upper House normally, but normally when you get an answer you move on to something new.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: If you want to be abusive, Minister, you can do that.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There are a lot of issues in FACS; get on with it.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You have been around a long time, Minister. I would have thought that you would have understood how this works.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I know exactly how it works. What I am hearing is somebody who has only got one lot of questions.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I do not think it is unreasonable for members of this Committee to ask a very simple question on behalf of children at risk in New South Wales. If you are going to cut the budget will you guarantee that not one less child will fall through the cracks as a result of those cuts? I do not think that is an unreasonable question, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is not an unreasonable question.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: The children of New South Wales need us to ask these questions.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is not an unreasonable question nor was my answer unreasonable, and I will provide it again. I am absolutely committed to ensuring that every child in New South Wales is as safe as they can be. Whether they are with their parents, with foster carers or in any of our other residential care facilities, that is the job of the Government and we will do what we can. But, as I have said to you, any cutbacks—any efficiency savings—will be directed to staff reductions in the central parts of FACS, and I read you the line. I think that answers the question to the extent that there will be reductions and efficiencies within the central parts of FACS but the remainder of FACS will have as many staff as we need, and if we need more then I will certainly be arguing with Treasury to get more. That is why we now have an additional \$200 million over the next four years to deal with children in out-of-home care, which is certainly a substantial increase in the budget but is it enough?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Which is very important but it is different. You have given up your chance to provide this information through your members—you could have done that earlier.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am sorry; I did not understand the last comment.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: The Government has given up its time to ask questions. If you wanted to head into a long discussion about what you are doing you had the opportunity to have Government members ask questions so that you could put that on the record.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not know what part of the world you come from. But I have answered the question and you can waffle as much as you like.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: That is right. The Hon. Penny Sharpe has asked a question about financing and the Minister has answered it.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do you have time limits in the upper House? I do not think you do, do you?

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: We do now.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You do now? Thank heavens, because I could not bear being with you for more than a couple of hours.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: We do—because of them we brought them in.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Really, thank God.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Have you done an assessment of the amount of staff that we lost in the central office and the amount of support they provide to frontline caseworkers? Are you simply dumping more work onto frontline caseworkers as you cut staff centrally?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, not at all. But I can tell you—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Has there been any modelling or assessment done?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We are looking at those efficiencies now.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Are you saying there is modelling done?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Heavens, would you be quiet while I answer the question?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: We are asking you questions; answer them.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Will you stop getting stroppy if you do not like the questions?

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Point of order—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The Minister should be brought to heel.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: The Minister should be able to complete his answer rather than interrupting him with interjections as he attempts to do so. Then we would have a much more orderly Committee meeting.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Perhaps if he did not engage in repeated sledging and abuse he might be allowed to answer the questions.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: To the point of order—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You should talk about sledging and abuse—you are the expert on it.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: The Minister is constantly debating the question; he does not get to do that.

CHAIR: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: As I was saying, if there is a need for more staff then I will certainly be the strongest advocate. When I have been out, as I have been in these first few months in this job, and I have been to places like Wilcannia, Brewarrina, the Tweed, Wagga Wagga and a host of other frontline community services centres [CSCs] there is no question that each of the community workers, each of the FACS frontline workers, are under pressure because there is a rising number of reports of children at risk of harm. That is an issue for all of us. It is an issue that Opposition and Government should be interested in. What is the right balance of taxpayers' money to go into this area is a very difficult—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is not the question I asked. As I said, you had an opportunity to speak about where you have visited—and I appreciate that you have been visiting frontline services, and I think everyone on the Committee would welcome that. I want to take you back to the question in relation to the figures of foster carers.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Can I just explain something here?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No, actually.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I can, actually. And I will explain this to you.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No, you cannot. Excuse me, I am asking the questions.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You see this is the way it works.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: If you cut me off then I will cut you off.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I finish my answers; you don't get to do it. That is my choice, not yours.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It does not work that way.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am sorry that the Minister feels so upset about the line of questioning.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You should be directing her to make sure that when I am answering a question, I can answer it.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am completely in order, Minister.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, you are not.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, you are not.

CHAIR: Order! The Minister will come to order.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Okay, you can play kindergarten if you want.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Before I begin my questioning I declare that my wife and I are moving through a process of foster caring. We are not approved but we are moving through the process.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Hear! Hear!

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It is on the record that in the past we have asked questions about this matter so I will continue with that line of questioning. While the statistics are a little outdated, in 2010-11 17,000 children and young people were in out-of-home care in New South Wales. Those rates have been rising heavily since then. I understand that those rates have significant budget implications, which you have noted, for

the Government. I also understand that "Keep Them Safe: A shared approach to child wellbeing" action plan recommended transferring the majority responsibility for the out-of-home care delivery to the non-government sector. How is the Government going with that process or is it continuing to transfer to the non-government sector?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: First of all, I thank you for your statement at the outset. I thank you for your interest and that of your wife in being a foster carer. One of the biggest challenges that governments have had—whether Labor or Liberal—is to get enough foster carers, and foster carers who can really make a difference in the lives of young people who often come from very damaged backgrounds. At the moment, the Government is spending about \$960 million—it is available in the actual budget documents, but close to \$1 billion—on out-of-home care. Following on the back of the Wood royal commission report, which came down in about November 2008, there were recommendations obviously that we should look at moving more children in out-of-home care across to the non-government sector, and that has been progressing. At the current time I think somewhere in the region of 55 to 57 per cent of children are in the care of non-government providers.

I have to say generally that whether it is the NGO sector or whether it is FACS, carers do an amazing job. One of the challenges for me as the new Minister is to look at how we deal with that transfer but also to make sure that children—I think implicit in the Wood Royal commission recommendations was that NGOs will always do it better. I do not actually share that view. There are NGOs that can do it better, but some NGOs may or may not do it better. In my first few months I have met with carers who are saying that perhaps they would like more support. If you are going to be a foster carer I encourage you and thank you. The new contracts come up next year, but I am looking at whether or not we need to delay that for a year or so. From the point of view of outcomes for children I want to look at what the possible metrics are around ensuring that children are generally getting a much better outcome from non-government organisations.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Are there any initiatives to encourage successful NGOs to mentor those that are not doing so well or do not have such a good standard? I hear already that there is quite a broad range of them that are maybe not so crash hot as opposed to others that are leading the benchmarks. Are there any incentives to do what governments do where they are brother or sister agencies?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We are looking at all options, but to be honest in my first few months I had not considered whether or not a mentoring program from some NGOs to others was one of those metrics. But I am happy to take that on board. I think that is a very good suggestion. Generally, organisations in the community sector work well together and generally the good things one is doing will influence the others. Whether or not there is a formal mentoring program, there certainly is an informal mentoring program already. But I take on board your suggestion and I am happy to pursue that one because I think that is a really good idea.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Obviously there are a lot more kids than there are carers in the sector. What are you doing to help kids from rural and regional areas where there is not a plethora of carers? From what I understand, there are more cases than are budgeted for. Is that right?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am sorry. I do not quite understand the question.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: My understanding is that in regional and rural areas NGOs are allocated a certain amount of funding to handle an amount of cases. Is that right?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There is a contract, obviously, and then they have so many children, yes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Then there is a little threshold for emergency care and they can apply to get some emergency opportunity. Is that right?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes. They can ask for additional funding. That is right.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What happens when a region has more emergencies than the funding allows? What does the department do in that situation if you exhaust that threshold?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No child is going to not get the funding to be in out-of-home care. That is absolute; that will happen. For example, there is a new NGO just moving into Broken Hill at the moment. It is obviously going to have funding to do more. Part of the complexity in regional areas is that there is a highly disproportionate number of Aboriginal children who are in out-of-home care. One of my concerns when I was

recently in Broken Hill was that it is very difficult to get carers. The placement principles for an Aboriginal child are that you would like the child to be in Aboriginal care and preferably by the same mob so there are the same cultural issues right down to that detail.

But in regional areas what I understand is often a difficulty is that if they are from a different group or even from a different mob—to use the Aboriginal expression—it can create tensions in the local community. In fact, it was recently reported to me that in one regional community there was a real reluctance of Aboriginal carers to get involved because if the family was in the same town the other family whose child was taken away often came round and imposed on them moral if not other pressure to return the child. There are some real issues around this and the NGOs need to be conversant with those highly challenging issues. We are doing everything we can, but basically there is no child who should miss out on getting proper care in out-of-home care due to funding models. One way or another we will ensure that there is funding there for that purpose.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: How much of the increase in out-of-home care is due to the ice epidemic?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There are no figures on that, but in my view it is quite substantial. Talking to communities—I will not name the regional areas on the basis of what I am about to say because I do not want to badge particular regional areas—in some of the regional areas I have been in, particularly in the parts further west in the State, there is a very strong view from the local communities that ice has become a tsunami, in effect. It is destroying communities. In fact, in one particular regional area I was shocked to hear that little kids as young as four and five years old were on the street at 4.00 a.m. and 3.00 a.m. The people from non-government organisations unanimously said to me, "But, Minister, they are actually safer there than they are in their own homes and it is because of ice." That is just one of the sad realities, but there are no figures on that at this point.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Will we be seeing some figures shortly?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am not sure that is going to be possible in the short term, but from the point of view of FACS whether it is ice, heroin, family breakdown or domestic violence we need to make sure that resources are there to respond. Of course, the Government and I as Minister are committed to doing that.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: The Government is looking into domestic violence programs in schools, which it is to be congratulated on. People hurt people so prevention is better than cure.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You are talking about programs within the schools as well?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: For domestic violence education. Obviously, an outcome of those programs will be that kids will talk about situations. What provisions has the Government made to deal with kids who are actually experiencing domestic violence talking through that program? Do you have a provision, budget or some sort of plan?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Part of the overall Child Protection budget is about those children being able to reach out to workers. You would be aware that we are the first Government to have appointed a Minister for domestic violence.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: You are to be applauded for that too.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes. We had a meeting only last week. Pru Goward is bringing Ministers together to ensure that there is a cross-portfolio response, trying to get rid of the silos of government. I think we will see some really positive outcomes from that.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: We know in child protection that some kids want to talk about their life and their world, and suddenly they need counsellors. I am just putting you on notice that you will need some provision for that.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Thank you for that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, what proportion of Aboriginal children is currently being placed in out-of-home care in accordance with the Aboriginal placement principles?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: At the moment I think there are nearly 7,000 Aboriginal children as part of the roughly 20,000 children and by far the majority of those are in Aboriginal care. As I understand it the figures are at around about 80 to 85 per cent. Sometimes it is not possible, which is disappointing. I think you and I would share the view that it is disappointing. Again I will not name the regional area, but when I was in one of those remote areas recently I was told that if it comes down to, for example, a child being kept in an area where there are no Aboriginal placement carers rather than going five hours away off country, as it was referred to, then sometimes reluctantly FACS places the child with non-Aboriginal carers. But overall statewide it is at less than 15 per cent.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Did you say it was about 82 to 85 per cent?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: About 80 to 85 per cent of children.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Because it was at 89 and it dropped down to 82. I just wondered where it is now.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is about 85. But if you want some specifics I will get that for you later. I am happy to do that. In fact, I think that is a really good point. What I, and I am sure you, would like to know is whether it vary from district to district, because we now have the 15 districts.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You have just got my next question, so if I could get that answer on notice—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I would be quite happy to do it. I would be interested to find out. One of the challenges is the further away you are from other communities. In the remote west it is really difficult because the children there are being sent literally five or seven hours away off country. Some children are being sent across the border, which is a bit of a problem.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There is some good work being done in the New England region, working with the Grandmothers Against Removals and coming up with a set of principles that will see FACS engage with community elders—first of all, to try to have early intervention to avoid the child being removed.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is obviously preferable.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Secondly, if the child has to be removed to find placements wherever possible within the community. Can you give a commitment to resourcing that and making sure that that positive step forward becomes a model for the rest of New South Wales?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: In broad principle, I agree with it. Yes, in terms of resources I will do everything humanly possible to make sure that is the case. I am totally supportive of the Grandmothers Against Removals, and I have spoken to a couple of them about some of their concerns. I would like to know that, from a professional point of view, and I think generally the community has the best answers—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: This is on the assumption that FACS have had a look at it and signed off on the agreement.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Exactly.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If FACS New England is signing off on the agreement, I am sure it has spoken with the secretary and others. Would you commit to putting your support behind that kind of arrangement?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Absolutely. I think having a centralised approach to dealing with the community is completely the wrong way to go. Generally Aboriginal communities, like any other community, know what they want and what they need. I know there is some work being done but I am not across the detail of it. I am happy to say yes on this. In fact—and this is almost scary—I agree with you 100 per cent on this one. That is quite worrying.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It troubles us both, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It does.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In the past five years there was an excellent pilot program run in Lightning Ridge, between Lightning Ridge and Walgett. They had an epidemic of child removals in Lightning Ridge. Then FACS engaged with the community and came up with programs working with the local land council to return children to the community. Minister, if you are not aware of this program, perhaps Mr Coutts-Trotter or others are. What happened to the pilot project and how did it influence broader responses from FACS?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Seeing as you are raising an issue that I am particularly interested in, I am happy to ask any one of my officers here whether they are familiar with it and, if they are, then what they think about it.

Ms WALK: I think the program you might be talking about is safer families. It has had reviews from the Ombudsman's office and in some areas it is seen as really helpful.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: This was a very site-specific Lightning Ridge program with some Aboriginal grandmothers there.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do you know what it was called?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I do not know whether it was given a title—perhaps that is why it has not been captured. It was just enormously successful.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Public servants love an acronym so if you could give us one then that would be good.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It might start with "LR".

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do you know what they were doing?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They were particularly engaging with some of the grandmothers and other elders in the community and doing what you would hope would happen at all times—that is, talking with them before a child is removed, engaging with them when a risk of harm report is put in and trying to keep children on country.

Ms WALK: One of the things that is working really well in some of our sites in particular is the Aboriginal child and family centres, which provide a hub for exactly what you are talking about. They enable very young children, in the zero to five age group, to attend child care, with grandmas and other family members engaged in support services. There is a fantastic one in Lightning Ridge and another in Brewarrina—some of those particular towns where we need to attend to both the older members of the family and the child development issues. So there is a good basis for developing further models.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can you table with the Committee at some point a copy of the Aboriginal child placements principles, Minister?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes, sure. I have just spoken with my chief of staff and have been told that that apparently came out—and I do vaguely remember this because it was pretty horrific at the time—when we were not in government because it was in about 2010.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I said it was about five years ago. It commenced five years ago.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Heaven only knows why, but 19 children were removed in one day by FACS.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Indeed.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think that instigated the Grandmothers Against Removals aspects. I am sure there was a lot of work done. Mr Shoebridge, now that you have raised it, I will take a trip to Lightning Ridge to see what is going on up there.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am happy to come with you, Minister, for a short period.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is the story of my life—no-one wants to spend much time with me; it is terrible.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will spend a day with you at Lightning Ridge. I turn now to the current rate of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. It was at 37 per 1,000 in 2004-05. There was a huge spike under the former Government, and it rose to 77 per 1,000 in 2013. Do you know what the current rate of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in New South Wales is?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: At the moment if there are 6,000 out of 20,000 then it is about 40 per cent I would assume.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Of the number of children in care it is about 35 per cent to 40 per cent but as a proportion of all Aboriginal children in New South Wales, what is it? It was at 77 per 1,000 in 2013. The national average at the time was 49 per 1,000. What is the current figure?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not know. Let us find out. Does anybody know the answer?

Ms WALK: Currently 92 per cent of Aboriginal children are happily raised by their parents, and between 7 per cent and 8 per cent of Aboriginal children are in care. As we were just talking about, many of those children who we say are in care are in the care of their grandparents or in kinship care. So it is between 7 per cent and 8 per cent of the Aboriginal population.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Could you please give us the exact figures on notice?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes, we will get those.

Ms WALK: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, there have been very disturbing reports of 340 occasions when children have been placed with carers where there is a risk of harm report against the carer. Minister, you were saying before that they are not all foster carers; they are carers generally. Can you explain who they are and what the class of people is?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: This goes back to the channel 7 story again.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, but you were saying they are not all foster carers; they are carers. I just wondered if you could explain what that means.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The way the figures were interpreted was not direct. I am not sure how to put this. It came off the back of the Ross reports. Obviously a lot of those risk of serious harm reports are not about children in care; they are children who might be with their parents, grandparents or teachers—it could be anybody. So those numbers were, if you like, interposed. When the report comes out from the department—when they give me the report—I will happily share it with you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can you on notice to provide the list of carers—if this is not just foster carers, what is the class of people the risk of harm reports were made against?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I can see my secretary writing wildly enthusiastically. When he starts writing with his left hand, I just know that he is desperate to say something.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I was just taking a note of action.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Okay. We will find out for you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think the most disturbing aspect was that in 173 of those incidents there had been previous risk of harm reports made—that is, there had been more than one risk of harm report made against the carer. What structures are in place at the moment in the department for when you have a second risk of harm report against a carer? Does it trigger something different from the first risk of harm report?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes, it does

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What is it?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes, it does, because obviously each time there is a risk of serious harm report that goes to the helpline the child's history and the history of each of those reports is considered as part of the overall response. It can be gauged as a 24-hour response, 72-hour response or 10-day response. That is a factor that is taken into account. I still think the secretary is looking very energetic. He is bouncing around like a two-bob watch. Mr Coutts-Trotter, do you want to say something?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Are you sure, Minister?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Go for it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What is different for the second report?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The judgement that will be made from a child protection perspective would be a judgement informed by precisely the context and the information the Minister has described. Then there is our responsibility to investigate reports that concern a carer. So the two processes interact but they are separate. We have, as you know, a reportable conduct unit within the department that focuses solely on dealing with those reports and allegations against our carers. Uniquely in New South Wales, that process is overseen by the Ombudsman. We and non-government organisations that support out-of-home care have a responsibility to share with the Ombudsman all the allegations against our carers. Some are considered lower order—so-called class and kind matters. But for more serious matters, which we or other care providers would investigate in respect of carers, those investigations are then reviewed by the Ombudsman to ensure that the Ombudsman remains comfortable with the investigation itself and any actions that we take.

So obviously if we have intervened and taken a child into care, we have an extraordinary duty to that child that means we need to invest a lot of time, effort and care into making good judgements about that. But it is also true to say that, appropriately so, the threshold for the risk of significant harm reports for children in care is actually higher in some respects than it is for children living with their families. Any allegation of physical abuse—anything from a smack to a serious assault—triggers a risk of significant harm report for a child in care.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I might ask you some further questions on timing and the like on notice?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Sure.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, I am trying to understand the nature of the job cuts that are happening in the central area of FACS. I would like you to confirm a couple of things for me. Is it the case that the baseline headcount for the central office is around 1,752 people?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am sorry, would you repeat the question?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, it would help if you were paying attention. I am trying to get to the bottom of what the job cuts in the central office will look like in practical terms and the numbers around those jobs. Is it the case that the baseline headcount for centralised FACS at this point in time is 1,752 people?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Centralised FACS obviously reflects that it is now one FACS, and as we progress it is appropriate that there be efficiencies around the people who in effect are in duplicated positions. The actual numbers I am happy to take on notice and get for you in due course.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I do not actually need that. I will refer you to another document.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What are you after then?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I show you the summary document of workplace changes that was put out on 17 July. I can give you a copy.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Is this the document to which you refer?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes. My reading of this document says that this is not all of FACS. The table reads "strategic reform policy program and service design".

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Nothing in the districts.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am not suggesting there is anything in the districts; I am asking whether the headcount in central FACS is 1,752 people?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think it is but I will check. Yes, it is.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: As at 17 July?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will let the Secretary answer that question because he is wildly enthusiastic about it.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: This is the starting point for the reductions in staff that we have made at the centre of the organisation. As you know, we created 15 districts. At a district level for almost two years now people have been leading teams that combine child protection, disability and social housing but the centre of the organisation did not reflect that new way of operating. So we have changed the centre of the organisation and thus far we have delivered significant savings—most of those have come from reducing executive positions by 50 per cent. So the broad executive cohort is now 50 per cent smaller than it was when we started. That is where the majority of the savings are coming from.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Essentially that figure is correct. I refer you to the document we talked about earlier that says the savings are going to require you to be 30 per cent smaller. Does that mean 600 jobs from that headcount?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: No. We had funded positions, we had people in jobs employed by the department and we had contractors. The savings as a whole come from contractors. The savings come in three areas so you cannot do the arithmetic you have just done. We have significantly reduced our use of contractors, reducing positions that were funded but did not have an occupant and then reducing positions that were funded and had an occupant.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Leaving aside those cuts and those numbers, can I confirm that there have been 26 full-time equivalent staffing positions cut from the out-of-home care for vulnerable children and young people in this year's budget?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: That does not sound correct to me at all.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It is in the budget papers.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I am happy to take that question on notice but we have not reduced any frontline positions.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It says 26 full-time equivalent staffing are gone. Are you saying they have gone centrally?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am not stopping you, but are you still referring to this document?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No, I am talking about the budget papers.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: In that case I will continue to answer the questions. If you want any details on that I will take the question on notice but my advice from the department is that there have been no cuts to any frontline staff.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, I am not asking about frontline staff. I am asking about what the budget papers say: there are 26 full-time equivalent staffing positions cut from the out-of-home care for vulnerable children and young people for 2015-16?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The Secretary is saying that he can explain it, so I will allow him to do so.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We have a total budget and all of our effort is allocated completely to the service groups. So if you are making a saving in the centre it appears in the service groups as well. To the extent that there are smaller increases in expenditure or changes in staffing numbers in those service groups, they are as a result of the changes and savings we are making at the centre of the organisation.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I really just want you to confirm that there are 26 fewer jobs in out-of-home care for vulnerable children and young people. Are you saying that we cannot confirm that?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There are no cuts to frontline services.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is not what I am saying.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is the answer to the question.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I will ask you about another part of the budget then—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think the Secretary—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: —which is to confirm that 82 full-time equivalent staffing positions were cut from statutory child protection in the budget?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Again, to the extent that corporate and administrative staff are providing support for statutory child protection, for disability, for out-of-home care, if you make savings to those corporate back-office jobs in the centre of the organisation it changes the numbers in the service groups as well. It does not mean that we have gone anywhere near people who are on the frontline or very closely supporting those on the frontline because we haven't.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Can I just say—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, can you guarantee that the jobs that have gone are not impacting on frontline caseworkers by adding to their administrative burden?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I can guarantee you that we are not cutting any frontline workers.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is not my question, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You are very enthusiastic, Ms Sharpe.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am. This is something that I care about a lot, as do the other Committee members.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: If there are any positions that are cut in the efficiency savings that governments of both political persuasions from time to time have to make, if there are any impacts on frontline staff in any manner, shape or form then I will be the first to be arguing against that because that is certainly not the intent.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, you cannot guarantee that as a result of a decision your Government took in this budget and its savings impact that there is not going to be an impact on caseworkers by adding to their administrative burden and their ability to actually deal with kids at risk?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I can guarantee that if that happens and if there are issues about that then I will be the first arguing for more money. Having said that, when I was out recently at one of the community service centres [CSC], a very big one in Western Sydney, they were telling me that they have changed their work practices and that they do have somebody who helps with administration now and it is making a big difference. So if that turns out to be the case, if I can find ways to get them extra staff then I will.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I turn now to the Auditor-General's report. It was found that at 5 July last year 46 per cent of the 2,072 children and young people case managed by the department and who had been

in statutory care for more than 12 months had not been subject to a placement review during the preceding 12 months. What is the Government doing in relation to this, given that you are not meeting your own statutory obligations?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have indicated to the department that my expectation is that the department will comply with all of its statutory obligations. I have indicated that they are to respond to the recommendations of the Ombudsman in a positive way.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: This is not the Ombudsman; this is the Auditor-General.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Sorry, the Auditor-General. And they are—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, 1,000 children in out-of-home care are supposed to have had a review in 12 months and the Auditor-General is saying they have not had one. That is an outrageous number—46 per cent, almost half.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: The Hon. Penny Sharpe is not asking a question; she is making a statement. The Minister was trying to answer the original question but was interrupted by the Hon. Penny Sharpe making a statement. The Minister should be allowed to answer his questions without the Hon. Penny Sharpe interrupting so that she can make political statements.

CHAIR: The Minister will continue with his answer.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: As I was saying, with regard to each of the reports, whether from the Auditor-General or the Ombudsman, the Government's attitude is that the department will comply with all of its obligations. I have asked the department to ensure that it takes every step to do that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, the Government's legislation requires the placement of a child or a young person to be reviewed at least every 12 months. It is not enough to say, "I have asked them to look at it." Are you able to provide more detail to the Committee?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I did not say that. I said I have directed the department to ensure that it does everything possible to comply.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: And to provide a positive response.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: There are 1,000 children, or 46 per cent, whose cases are not receiving the review. Minister, the "NSW 2021 Performance Report 2014-15" says that the goal of the State is to reduce the rate of children and young people reported at risk of significant harm by 1.5 per cent per year per 1,000 of population. However, the Auditor-General's report states that the rate increased by 12.8 per cent. What are you doing to address this issue?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We are trying to reduce it substantially, not just by 1.5 per cent but by 10 per cent.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: There has been a 12 per cent increase.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have asked the department to put together a strategy to ensure that there is a reduction by 10 per cent over the next few years, if we can do it.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You are not meeting the statutory requirements. You say that you want a decrease of 1.5 per cent, yet the rate has increased by 12 per cent. You now say that somehow the department has the ability to reduce it by 10 per cent, when the Government has cut the budget across the board and there are fewer staff. How will that work?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There are more children being seen now. In absolute numbers, under Labor there were about 10,000; we are seeing about 20,000 now. The numbers are going up, so obviously there are pressures, but we are seeing far more than were seen under Labor. That is not sufficient; that is not what I want. I want the situation to be far better than it currently is. There are issues no matter who is in government. But this Government is seeing more than were seen under your regime. I will do everything I can to make sure that that

continues. The department has its strategy and needs time to work through the requirements, and I have given it directions to do that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Perhaps the department could respond by indicating what action is being taken, given it has fewer staff.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It has not—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Are you saying there have been no cuts in staff? We are going in circles.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You are.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: The Government's documents say there is a \$70 million cut.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You are obsessed with staff.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am obsessed with having enough people to do the job for the children of this State.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have said in every possible way—and I will be very calm as I respond to you again—that I will ensure that there are adequate frontline staff to do the job. That is what I am doing at present.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So can I ask Mr Coutts-Trotter how the department is responding to the Auditor-General's recommendations?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have answered the question.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You are not going to allow him to do that. That is disappointing. Will you take on notice and report to this Committee the detail of how the Government is addressing the issues raised in the Auditor-General's report?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Which specific issues are you asking about?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: All of the recommendations, if that is what you want, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not want anything. I want to know what you want.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I have tried to ask you about this specifically. I want to know why half the children in statutory care are not getting the review that they deserve and are entitled to, and that we have enshrined in law to ensure their protection. I want to know what specific action is being taken by the department to address this matter. I want to understand how, in a climate of cuts, the department will be able to deliver this. Already 1,000 children have been left without support for 12 months. I want to know what you are doing about it. It is not good enough to say to this Committee, "I have asked them to look at it, they are going to deal with it and I have made a new target," when you have not been meeting your own targets.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is an interesting statement, but I asked which question you wanted answered. What is the question on notice?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: What action is your department taking in relation to each of the recommendations in the Auditor-General's report of 2014? It is straightforward.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You would like specific details on each recommendation?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is correct.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: On all recommendations, not just the issue you have raised?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is correct.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am happy to do that for you. I would be delighted.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am very pleased. I do not think that it is an unreasonable question.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is a very reasonable question.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: For once we agree, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What a reasonable person you are.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am very reasonable. I turn to the Ombudsman's report. Has your department accepted the recommendations of the Ombudsman's review of the New South Wales child protection system, which reported in April 2014? Did the Government accept and adopt all the recommendations?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: All the recommendations have been accepted. The Government is working to ensure that it can address them as quickly as possible.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Would you be prepared to provide to the Committee the details of how each recommendation is being addressed?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Is that a question on notice?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I can ask for the answer now or I can put the question on notice. Given that you are feeling so magnanimous towards the Committee, perhaps you would provide a detailed response on notice—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not know that I would want to go to Lightning Ridge with you. I am happy to go with Mr David Shoebridge. I am not feeling that magnanimous, but I am happy to take on board any reasonable questions that you ask and to provide answers.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You cannot debate the question. We have been around this block before.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Tell me exactly what you want and I will try to get it for you.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am telling you. It is straightforward. The Ombudsman's report "Review of the NSW Child Protection System: Are things improving?", a special report to Parliament under section 31 of the Ombudsman Act 1974, was published in April 2014. It made a number of recommendations. Will you provide to this Committee your department's response to how it is addressing each of those recommendations?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Will you also confirm that—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do not push your luck.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, I can push my luck all I like. Will you also confirm that each of the recommendations was accepted by your department?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I accept that the recommendations require a response from the department. I have asked the department to provide me with full details of that, which I will provide to you.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You cannot confirm that you accepted every recommendation?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I just said I did.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Governments accept recommendations; departments do not.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Mr David Shoebridge made the point that I have to work through the recommendations with the department to make sure that it agrees with each of them. If it does not—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I was answering your question and you lost interest. Heavens!

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: The answers have been pretty lame.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: They have been excellent.

CHAIR: I have questions about the FACS online dashboard. I note that the data for the June quarter have not yet been published. What is the explanation for that, given the Government's undertaking to produce the dashboard in a timely fashion?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It has to be published by the end of each quarter. My birthday was yesterday, so today is 31 August, which is the end of the quarter. It has probably been published today. I will check. Mr Secretary, has it been published today?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It is just in time for the hearing. Well done, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Thank you for your congratulations. You are not all bad after all.

CHAIR: It appeared on the website overnight. It was not there yesterday afternoon. Would you explain how the figures are gathered for the dashboard? What is the process?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is drawn from data from the department.

CHAIR: Who does that?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: A unit within the department draws together the information. It is obviously done by the department. What is the issue?

CHAIR: I am trying to understand who in the department does it.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do you mean the individuals?

CHAIR: No. Is there a unit within the department that draws together the information and summarises it in a table?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is exactly what happens.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Will that unit continue to exist after the staff cuts?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will make sure it is there for you so that you receive a personalised copy of the dashboard.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I have a copy. My question goes to whether caseworkers will have to deal with the data because staff in the department have been cut.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You conspiracy theorist. I would hate to be in the upper House with you.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It is not that bad.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Is she all right most of the time? It is a worry when the Liberals at the table start to—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: There are many who are worse. I will give you a list of who is worse.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: In the lower House or the upper House?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It goes without saying.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have no intention of seeing that reduced. It is important. The dashboard was a commitment of this Government to make sure that the data is publicly available. Labor in government did not do that. It is a good tool.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No-one doubts that. I am asking whether caseworkers will have an increased load, rather than being able to deal with children.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You must be kidding. Staff in the central office will go on providing the necessary transparency. Transparency, contrary to what your Government thought, is what drives change. I am committed to transparency, so that will continue.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: What support does your department provide to young people's organisations, such as the CREATE Foundation for kids in care?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: They are funded largely by the State Government, obviously.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Have there been any cuts to their funding?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: All I heard was "cuts to funding". No, there have been increases. In fact, can I say, I think those organisations do a fantastic job. There is lots more work to be done for young people. It bothers me that we have so many young people who are entering care but also who find themselves homeless. So there is a lot more work to be done on that and a lot more work to be done—perhaps if I get a chance I might tell you a bit about it—in terms of children leaving care, which also is another issue I am concerned about.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: If we could go back to adoptions? I have heard from some stakeholders that some adoptions have taken up to five years. They are obviously quite complicated. Does the department have some sort of traffic light system where they are able to flag adoptions that have taken longer than a year, two years, three years, that they can look into and probably relieve the carers and the children from traumatic situations of unresolved issues, court issues or family issues?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Clearly, whatever is being done at the moment is not adequately addressing the issues because—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Five years is unacceptable.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I agree; I think it is terrible. We have got to the stage where I think the year before last—it has all got to be kept in perspective—there were 84, for example, out-of-home care adoptions; that was two years ago. Last year I think it got up to 87. But the real issue, if you look at what is happening Australia-wide, this is an Australia-wide problem.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I believe there were 200 out of 27,000.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is terrible. You are talking about the broad picture on adoptions. But the out-of-home care, which is a big issue in terms of permanency, there were 89, off the top of my head, give or take one or two, for the whole of Australia. So it is remarkable that New South Wales is doing as well. Having said that, are we doing well enough? Absolutely not. The department has made some changes and they are really good changes.

For example, when I visited Tweed not that long ago I found sitting in the community service centre an officer there who was tasked solely and completely with trying to change the culture around looking at

encouraging adoption considerations—permanency through adoptions. There are a number of those people across the districts—I do not think anywhere near enough. It is a pity Ms Sharpe has gone because I am quite happy to say I think there is a need for more of those and more money for those; I will argue for that in Treasury. Of course, we have also got the Institute of Open Adoption, which is a reflection of the Premier's commitment and mine.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It is \$2.85 million.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is about right, yes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It is very helpful.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is and that is progressing. Hopefully that will be up and running fairly soon in terms of making further suggestions.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: When you say "fairly soon", is that this side of Christmas or the other side of Christmas?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not know whether they will make it before Christmas, but hopefully as soon as possible. That is one of the issues I have in this area, and I have got my staff working on it at the moment in terms of having a forum. I do not know whether you remember but a few months ago I had a really good forum about social housing that brought everybody together to look at—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: We missed our invite. We will talk about that next session.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I apologise, Paul. I think we invited The Greens and Labor, but I forgot you. I apologise.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: He is the chair of the committee.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I apologise.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I forgive you, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: All I am saying is that in terms of moving forward, we have the commitment and I am going to bring together a forum to try to work out what exactly are the issues. Obviously we cannot deal with adoptions more broadly, inter-country adoptions, although perhaps through New South Wales I might be able to put some pressure on our colleagues Federally to see what are the blockages. I think there is a lot more work to be done. There are no guarantees that it is suddenly going to change overnight but it should.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I want to go to the issue of homelessness now. You have got a new plan for a home for homeless during extreme weather events. Could you enlighten us what that is? Is it New South Wales-wide or—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, it is focused in Sydney at the moment. But, depending on how we go, we might need to focus it further into the regional areas. Funding of \$182 million has been put specifically into homeless services this year. Off the top of my head, it is somewhere between \$16 million and \$20-odd million that is going into just the Sydney area out of that for homeless. What you are talking about now is a particular initiative that came off—I think the storm was back in April. It is a better arrangement working between the City of Sydney and the State Government.

You might remember they were running around trying to find a place, effectively, for people who were homeless, those on the streets in Sydney, to give them a place that was safe from the storms. We have now managed to negotiate and work through. I acknowledge the work by Clover Moore on this. She is very committed to this, and, in fact, we launched it together a few weeks ago. It is about making sure there is a place located and all the agencies and all the NGOs are all structured to know who should be doing what and where. I think it will work well.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That brings me to my next question: the pop-up housing office in Woolloomooloo. Once again the initiative should be applauded, I think it is fantastic. If it was successful—

I have not heard a review on it but I think it would be probably very accessible to those in need—will you be moving it out to hotspots throughout New South Wales, given the homeless crisis throughout New South Wales?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am as keen as mustard on that one. The history of that is that the department, the Land and Housing Corporation, does a very good job in very difficult circumstances. But I guess the value of having a new Minister is that, hopefully, they come up with some new ideas. It seemed to me that the departmental officers were often having to see people who were homeless in an office somewhere and perhaps not having a full sense of understanding of just how desperate those people are and what their circumstances were. So I worked with the wonderful Paul VEVERS, who is sitting to my right, and we came up with the idea that we might have, as you said, a pop-up office. We took it down to Tom Uren Place at Woolloomooloo maybe three or four weeks ago now, and we had two weeks—three nights each week—and it was fantastic.

We had about 10 staff down there, two per table, three tables, and I think some of the homeless people down there—mostly men, but there were a couple of ladies—one of them said to me that initially he thought it was all just a bit of media hype. Actually, there were no media there; we did not do it for journalists, we did it for the people. By the second night they were well and truly on board with us. In fact, the first night we took 18 people off the street, which is incredible. The next night I think it was 13 and I cannot remember what the other nights were.

The other good thing that came out of it was that the staff was absolutely energised; they were really, really keen on it. So I think it is a great thing. Is it going to work in the longer term? That needs to be evaluated. I do not know the answer to that, but it was worth having a go and we did it in Sydney in Tom Uren Place. I may be a Liberal but I have a lot of time for what Tom Uren did for the country as a former serviceman and Labor member.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: A great urban affairs Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: He was a wonderful gentleman. I worked with him on the Hoc Mai Foundation and he was a really good, old-style Labor man of the true Labor Party of yesteryear. So it seemed very appropriate that we were there on that site doing that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: As opposed to the Tony Abbott approach to liberalism.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Tony Abbott does a lot of good work and you should stop undermining him. As somebody who has a balanced view and can see the benefits of both sides, it does not surprise me you cannot, Penny, but I can. But back to the task at hand. We are now going to take it out to Parramatta. We are going to try something outside the main CBD here. Parramatta is another city. I think we are doing that pretty soon.

Mr VEVERS: Mid-September.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The challenge will be to make sure not just that they get temporary accommodation but that they get the full transition and they get the wraparound support services that people need. That is what we are aiming for.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It would be great to maybe go regional a bit, given the housing inquiry finding about homelessness.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: If you have got any suggestions on where we could do that as the next regional one I am happy to take that on board.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Dubbo might be a good start. As to out-of-home care, just going back, obviously a couple of years ago under the Hon. Pru Goward fatalities in out-of-home care were quite an issue. Could you give us a report of where that is up to? Have there been any fatalities and, if so, how many and what are we doing to address that?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There are child deaths, obviously, continuing across the board. I do not have the figures for what the numbers of children would be in out-of-home care but obviously children die, and that is

whether they are with their parents or not; it is a sad reality. The figures that I have been given tentatively—which I do not think it is appropriate to put to this Committee yet because it is still raw data—indicate that there has been quite a substantial drop in the last couple of years. But I am happy to take that on board and have a chat to you about that privately. But I would like to make sure that the data is actually accurate, in terms of what is happening there.

Can I say that it is a big challenge. Any child in out-of-home care should be in a safe environment and it is very sad, terrible in fact, that a child—as the Secretary said earlier, they should be in the safest environment. We need to make sure that we do everything possible to ensure those children are kept safe. But there will be occasions, sadly, at times. One child, not so long ago, sadly drowned in a swimming pool. Is that directly related to the care or not? I do not know. I am not sure about that and how we work through that issue. But I have already, as a result of that, said that if a child is in out-of-home care, then we should be doing pool checks, if necessary, to make sure. That is normally up to the local council but maybe we need to go those extra steps. They are the sorts of issues I am looking at.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: You will be happy to know they did a pool check on us.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Good morning, Minister. Happy birthday.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Thank you very much.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: When did the Department of Family and Community Services publicly release the KPMG "Going Home Staying Home Post-Implementation Review 2015 Final Report"?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think it is already released but I will ask and check because I thought I saw the draft and I think it has gone out.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: It is published.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: When was it published?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I think June. I would need to check with Maree Walk. Was it June?

Ms WALK: I think it was July, either late June or early July.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Could you give me a date?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We will get you a copy.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I have a copy but I just want to know when it was published, the date on which it was published.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: How did you get a copy if it was not published? I cannot believe that.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I did ask you when it was published, not that it was not published. Minister, was the release of the report publicly announced?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We normally do but I am sorry, I do not recollect. I will have to find out. There are a lot of reports that go out and they normally are, but I do not know.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, given that there was so much outrage and community concern about this particular program and how it was going to affect women and children facing domestic violence—there was a parliamentary call for papers; there was also an Ombudsman's inquiry which was scrapped—do you think it is acceptable that the release of a report which actually reviewed the program was not publicly announced? The community was waiting for something like this for months.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Dr Faruqi, I do not think that is actually right. But let me just say this. On the substantive issue, I think what was highlighted in that report does highlight some of the shortcomings that occurred in that process. Having said that, I do not think it was you—I hope it was not you; otherwise I will be a little less benign—

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I guess, Minister, my question is that, given so much concern, why was not the publishing of the report publicly announced?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Well, I am not sure that is the case; I think it was. In any case, it was up on the website of the department.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Do you think that is good enough, Minister, given that for months communities were running campaigns about this seriously flawed and chaotic program, and when a review of that particular tendering process was done it was not even publicly announced?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Dr Faruqi, I know you have had quite a bit to say about it and I respect your position on this but I have to say to you, not necessarily you but some of the scare campaigners, the shock tactics that came out of, unfortunately, Sophie Cotsis and Linda Burney—I hope it was not at their instruction, I hope it was from their leader—talking about—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Standing up for women's refuges?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Talking about the fact that there would be reductions they said, they alleged in women's refuges and therefore services I think was quite counterproductive. I have had quite a close association with various women's services, women's refuges, for many years. For many years I have been involved with and known a number of people very well. Whilst there were concerns, some genuine concerns initially, that perhaps there might have been some services lost, the reality became very clear very quickly that there were going to be 76 services before, there were going to be 76 services afterwards. But that did not stop Linda Burney and Sophie Cotsis putting out a press release on 31 July 2014 saying there were going to be—

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, I am sorry, I am not really interested in those press releases.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You asked the question.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: The reality is, Minister, that across the State women are being turned away from refuges.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Dr Faruqi, I can answer the question.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: That was not my question.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Well, I can answer it though and I am answering it and I am going to finish before I come to it. That is, that they were saying there were going to be over 80 homelessness service providers closing their doors. That was total rubbish.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, I do know what they were saying but that was not my question. I will move on to the next question.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am sure you would not have been party to encouraging them because it was actually putting people off going to refuges that were actually there. So all I am saying is—

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, did KPMG—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD:—whilst it may not have been done as well as it could have in terms of communication—

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, could you confirm that KPMG—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD:—it was a straight-out scare campaign by Ms Cotsis—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I sat in a vacant refuge.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD:—who has finally spoken up. What do you want to say, Ms Cotsis?

CHAIR: Order! It is Dr Faruqi's time.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, could you confirm that KPMG submitted this report to the Department of Family and Community Services in January of this year?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not know, I was not the Minister then but I can tell you that it is up on the site.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Could you take that on notice, please, and give me an answer when KPMG submitted the report?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What is the significance of that?

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: There is significance, because if it was submitted in January and only released in July why was there a delay, when we know that people were waiting for the review of this report?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Dr Faruqi, the joys of Government are—

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Was it done because of the election and you did not want to release the report before the election?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am disappointed that you might take on some air of conspiracy. I am sure that if the department got a report, then it would be because they were working through the issues and that is quite proper. I am not denying that there were some issues; I agree with you.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: And Minister, coming to those issues, I will just highlight some of them. The report does suggest that the program was rushed, with very tight timeframes, it was under-resourced and it lacked transparency. Are you actually concerned about the repercussions of the flaws within the implementation of the programs on women fleeing domestic violence?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Obviously, anything that causes people who are already suffering domestic violence to feel that they have any additional pressure on them at all as a result of anything Government or anybody else does, including the Labor Party—not you, I do not think—is a source of concern. And I think the value of that report, if I can say this, is that I as the new Minister had the benefit of reading it and it sounds like you read it too and I think there are some lessons in there in terms of, as Government, whatever political persuasion you are, as you go about reform you have to take the community with you and you have to take the organisations with you. And they have to understand, with some reasonable time in advance, when you are doing these things, why you are doing them. And hopefully you are listening to them as you go. So I have actually read that report and taken it on board and I can assure you that it will have a positive impact, when we are looking at some of the other reforms that the Government has to do.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Do you plan on evaluating the actual impact of that so-called Going Home, Staying Home reform on people on the ground, on women, on children, who actually are being turned away from refuges because there is no room? Are you going to look at the impact on the ground?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We are constantly evaluating. Can I say, in the period where there was a scare campaign running but also, it was I think acknowledged, some stress within women's refuges—look, it is a very difficult area. Women's refuges—I assume you know the history—came out of the collective women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s. They were remarkable people who did some remarkable work. I know one of those women, who sadly passed away just two-and-a-bit years ago, Barbara Kilpatrick, one of the leaders in that area. She taught me a lot about the incredible worth of what the women's collective movement did.

But I also know having been involved, not as a Minister but just peripherally, that some of the refuges needed to run a little more efficiently to make sure that the services were there for people. Sometimes they were not doing that as well as they should. And I think that there were also a lot of other people who were missing out through being homeless and not having services. What I am hearing on the ground now, Dr Faruqi, is that yes it was difficult, yes it was challenging, and it was downright horrible in some cases, but it was actually positive because people are now seeing through the no-closed-door policy—

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, that is not what I am hearing on the ground. Could you answer the question?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Well, tell me what you—because that is what I am hearing.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I am hearing a different story. I can talk about that a little later.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Well, share it with me.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Will you evaluate the program and publicly release that evaluation, as KPMG has suggested in its report?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will have a look at that, and take it on board. I will not give you a guarantee now but I will certainly look at it. Can I say, I had a scheduled meeting with you the other day but you did not come. You had some inquiries. I am still waiting for you, and. I am happy to have that discussion with you offline

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, we have actually sorted another time for that meeting, so I will see you this week.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Have we? Good, I look forward to it.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: With regards to women's refuges and specialist homelessness services, will you explain the difference between operational hours and intake hours?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes. But again I would have thought intake hours and operational hours are pretty clear.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Will you explain to me the difference, because there is a big difference between intake and operational hours?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Operational hours for the usual women's refuge would be 24 hours, intake may be limited to some part of that 24 hours. It varies from refuge to refuge. It varies from area to area. In fact, again I have more than a passing knowledge of this area and I know that some refuges previously did not have 24 hour cover in terms of somebody being there. That has not changed remarkably, although most of the refuges that are now doing it, I understand, have longer intake hours. But if you think that is a problem, by all means give me the details because I am happy to look at it if there is an issue for you.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: During the tender and assessment process for Going Home Staying Home, was the difference between operational and intake hours actually taken into consideration?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I would need to go back and look at that but I have already indicated I do not think that that process was as good as it could be. It was a necessary process to undertake because we needed to provide better and more co-ordinated services, but I think with the benefit of hindsight none of the staff, none of the Ministers who were involved would be saying it was perfect; it was not.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: That difference is absolutely crucial and I will come back to it later.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You can ask me today, but you will not get much further on that, so if you have something else that is of interest, ask me. But if not, I am happy—

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I have plenty to ask you.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am happy to take that offline and have a chat with you if there are some issues. You have not been to see me about it so come and talk to me. My door must be the most open door in the Parliament and you have not been there.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I am talking to you now.

CHAIR: The remaining time will be broken in approximately two lots of 15 minutes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I refer you to the Bonnyrigg housing development. Did the fact that the Becton Property Group and its subsidiary, Bonnyrigg Developments, enter into receivership in 2013 increase the cost of the development of the Bonnyrigg Living Communities known as Newleaf?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not think it increased the cost, but unfortunately that was one of those broadacre areas that had certain challenges to it. I was out there a couple of months ago I it is going really well. I was talking to some of the tenants who are living in that area. It is under St George and the people were really, really happy with the outcome. Overall it is challenging. When you have got a broadacre public housing estate that is up for renewal there are challenges and there will be a lot more challenges in due course, but we are up for it. I think it is a bit unfortunate that governments of both political persuasions over many years allowed some of these broadacre public housing, not pepper and salted, if I can put it that way, public housing estates to come online. They are challenge. We need a totally different structure and I am working on that at the moment.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Do you know whether there an increase to the taxpayer in relation to this?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not think there was, but I will find out for you. It is a positive outcome.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Can you find out?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not think so.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: At what point was the department become aware that Becton was in financial trouble?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is not on my watch. I do not know, but I will find out for you.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You can find out?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What is the significance for that? If they are in financial trouble they will not tell us that too soon.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Can anyone at the table answer that question?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: How about I find out for you?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Was Becton obliged to pay any penalties to the department for failing to deliver the project as agreed?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not know. I will find out.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: What is the status of the Government's current negotiations with Bonnyrigg Partnership, as stated in the Land and Housing Annual Report?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is going well, as I said; it is progressing well. The other day I was out inspecting properties, maybe a month or two ago, and its outcomes are very positive.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Do you have a timetable?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: They are already opening new properties and building at the moment. There is an area that is about to go into new building work. It is on the western side of the estate. Unfortunately the fences are up at the moment so it is a bit hard to get in and see it. They are actually about to start new work and build more properties.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Do you know how many?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not off the top of my head, but it is going well.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Does Ms Skewes from Land and Housing know?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: She may, but I do not want to stress her right now or stress you. I will come back with the details.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: She has come to the Committee.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: She has but I am answering the questions.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: She is very expert in her area and should be able to answer these questions.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We will give you the answers later on that, if there are specifics about that.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It is of interest, of course as you know that there is a housing shortage and this is a very important project.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Why would that be?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is only one tiny part of what Ms Skewes is looking after. I have tasked her, and Land and Housing Corporation with reversing the 900 houses lost every year under Labor to ensuring that we reverse that situation.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You have been in government for nearly five years.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes, that is right

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: And you have been selling off more properties

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You had a very big problem, which we found. Your legacy was a very big problem.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am asking a very reasonable question.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: In all seriousness I am actually doing a massive amount of work at the moment to try to ensure that there is a lot more social housing. You would have heard the Premier announce last year with NCOSS and Infrastructure Partnerships that we are aiming to establish a vast amount more of social housing. One of the challenges for us, of course, is not to worry about just one estate. Bonnyrigg was one that fell in a heap and we extracted it from the heap—good—but there are a lot more. Former Premier Morris Iemma did some good work at Riverwood trying to encourage more development. I think the model down there indicates that there is a lot of work we can do using, not necessarily more taxpayers' money, but the assets taxpayers own to leverage off that.

The Community Housing sector has taken up about 26,000 now managements of community housing. They are looking to discuss with us right across the board how they can leverage to get more housing and they are certainly looking at whether they should have freehold or longer leases, so we can leverage that. There is a whole host of things happening on this front. I am very supportive of getting more social housing and, on top of that, if we can get some more affordable housing because unfortunately at the moment there is no place to transition people who can transition—not that there are a lot of them because unfortunately, sadly these days, around about 80 or 85 per cent of people in social housing have mental health issues, disability issues and so on. It has changed a bit in the past 20 years from when they were low-income workers so we need to have a holistic approach. On the Bonnyrigg one if you are only interested in that, I would encourage you to be more interested—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am interested in many projects that your Government said it would undertake, including Claymore. But on the point you made about community housing providers, do you have any plans to transfer the titles of government social housing properties to the community housing providers?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes, I do.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Is there a timetable in place?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: COAG actually agreed to that about three or four years ago, again before my watch. It agreed to aim for about 35 per cent of transfers to the community housing sector.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Do you support that target for your Government?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do. In fact, it may be possible that it may increase, too. I guess the question in my mind is: Why are we transferring it. One of the first and primary reasons is that traditionally, unfortunately, under your Government—I know you were not part of it—the Land and Housing Corporation had its predecessor because the Land and Housing corporation has only been there for three or four years in its current incarnation, but previously under your Government the focus was on simply building houses, which actually it did not do anyway because it was losing 900 a year and was allowing Housing to eat itself.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am sorry. I do not need a history lesson. I note that—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I thought you did.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I note that Federal and State Labor invested \$2.9 billion in housing. We did contribute. You have been in government for 4½ years and you are the—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Actually, thank heavens for Federal Labor—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: And you are the first Minister, your Government did not have a Minister for Housing.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Because it agreed to the COAG proposals.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I asking you—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I might send that to the PM's office. He will like that.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You stated you support the target of 35 per cent. When will the Government start transferring titles, if that is the case?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We already are. Let my qualify—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Which location?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not want the Hon. Penny Sharpe to get too excited about my support for Federal Labor.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I can see an excellent gift coming, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Thank heavens in one small modicum in the sense that it put its money into the national stimulus for some more housing because whilst State Labor was ripping out public houses, Federal Labor—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: And it took your Government 18 months to transfer the titles.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Building rental property that lives on the ground opposed.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The Federal Government.

CHAIR: Order! Members will not talk over each other.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Let me finish. Federal Labor was putting in some money, which actually did manage to level it all out but overall State Labor had an appalling attitude. We have reversed that. The Premier has made it very clear that we have a big agenda in terms of getting more social housing. I am absolutely committed to that, and we will. But—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: How much more? Can you tell us how much more?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We are working on that at the moment. In regard to the actual numbers, I was a bit stunned—I assume you have read last year's budget papers—to find that we are only looking at about 100 houses net a year. That is totally inadequate. So we have made it clear—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You have reduced that since you have been in government.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The Premier and I made it clear that we want more. That is something your government did not do. You did nothing. You ate the housing.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: We did do something.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Minus 900.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: We did, but going back to your point—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Exactly. Minus 900 every year, year after year—10 years actually.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You have told us that you want to increase that number. By how much?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: As many as possible. At the moment I am looking at all novel ways. Did you get invited or did you miss out on an invitation to the social housing forum?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I understand a number of my colleagues attended.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: The shadow Minister did not go.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: You did not bother going.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am not the shadow Minister for Housing; I am disability services.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do not give the Hon. Sophie Cotsis a hard time. I am giving her enough of a hard time. There was incredible energy. I did not bring that social housing committee forum together with about 500 people for the fun of it. I brought it together to get some energy and to look at innovative ways of getting more housing. If I could get another 5,000 a year I would do it. Is it possible? I do not think so. Is it possible perhaps to get to a point where we might get 500 or 1,000 a year? Maybe, and that is what we are now trying to do through any innovative method I can come up with, and I am looking at absolutely every possibility. Going back to the original question—how many more of those will be transferred to community housing—I do not know the answer yet. For a start, things are changing a lot in Family and Community Services because if you go to the McKell Building—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You are cutting 30 per cent of the staff so of course we are changing.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Are you back on that? You are a bit obsessed. Go and look at the McKell Building. I congratulate the Land and Housing Corporation, Ann Skewes, Paul Vevers and the secretary. I congratulate everybody. They have all done a fantastic job in just a few months. We now have a new combined centre down there called Redlink in the McKell Building, where all the services are coming to the people. On top of that, we have security. So we are making a difference now. The attitudes are changing. We are trying to provide those wraparound services. That is what I think drove the Federal Government and the State governments a few years ago to say that we should transfer more across to community housing. I have been committed to that for probably 15 years. I spoke at Coffs Harbour. In fact, recently I met a woman who said to me, "I was in the audience 15 years ago when you were the shadow Minister at the Coffs Harbour conference and I heard you say then the way forward was to have more transfers to community housing." I am committed to that, but I cannot give you a figure today because that would not be fair and reasonable until we have had time to work through those issues.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Will you be able to release targets by the end of the year?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, I do not think so. Let us just see how we play out and try to get as many as possible. However, I would say this to you. If I do not have a few thousand more in the next three or four years I will be very disappointed, because that is what I am aiming to do.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So that is your personal goal?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am the Minister. I guess my personal goals are the Government's goals. But if I can do triple or quadruple, I will invite you to the opening of the next big one.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You will even get a plaque.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I spent a couple of years on the housing inquiry.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not know whether I would invite the Hon. Penny Sharpe because she is a bit narky with me.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You mentioned that there are about 26,000 community housing properties and a number of those are leased from your department.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: From the Land and Housing Corporation.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Are you looking at extending the leases? One of the biggest issues is that at the moment they are on three-year rollovers.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is an issue because if we want the social housing providers, the non-government organisations, to be innovative, certainly a number of them take the view that in order to leverage—in other words, be able to raise funds, for example—they need something that can be securitised, to offer as security to the banks. The banks are showing interest in that. I am not quite sure yet what they need. The challenge is that on one hand—I am sure that as a member of the Labor Party you would appreciate this—at the moment they are in taxpayers' hands. They are owned by the taxpayer, effectively, through the Land and Housing Corporation.

If we alienate that by giving over very lengthy leases or by giving absolute title, effectively we are handing it over to community housing organisations. That is the first issue; we are handing it over. I am not saying we will; I am just saying that that is the issue. Secondly, if we do hand it over through a very long lease or through title transfer, what are the boundaries? How can we impose the boundaries and limits to ensure that they will still do what we want them to do? Those are the challenges. We are in the middle of that. I am happy for you to be involved in that debate because I think it is something that both sides of politics need to come to grips with.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It is important for me because half of the people living in public housing are people with disabilities or older people. So it is very important.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think the percentage is higher than that.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It is about that. But in regard to the leases, many community housing providers have said to us that they are looking at a figure of 20, 25, or 30 years. Are you looking at that period and to have leases for that long?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Obviously if they have said that to you, they have said that to me as well.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Do you have a figure?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, I do not have a figure. But I was a lawyer beforehand and I understand capitalisation and securitisation. Some of them are already doing it, in the sense that you have groups like Link Housing, which have already looked at leveraging models and which have produced additional homes off what they are doing currently. Others are simply saying that they need it. I think they need a longer lease structure. But the question will be: If we go down that path, what is the appropriate length? What do they need, and how

do we put that up against the fact that we are effectively handing over a taxpayer asset? I think a lot of that has to be about having the banks involved in discussion. Will they advance the funds? I hope they will. I am happy to look at any other models, and I am happy to take another question.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I will put the rest of the questions on notice. I have a question on a different matter. What was the total amount spent on motels for clients unable to access non-government organisation-run crisis accommodation in 2014-15?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not know why you ask these silly questions.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It is not silly. It is a figure.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That was not a debate; that was an observation.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It is a figure. The question was answered last year.

CHAIR: Do you want to take that question on notice?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, I want to give you the answer.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Just give me the figure.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Please do not interrupt. I was just making an observation on the way through. Last time you were in government you spent about \$28 million.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: This is the fifth year you have been in government. We want to know how much money you are spending on motels for crisis accommodation.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do not get excited. I was happy to take your question. I just want to give you the answer.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I get passionate about these issues. What is the answer?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Last time you were in government you spent about \$28 million. Last year we spent somewhere between \$14 million and \$16 million.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: It was \$14 million.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You had a big birthday party, it seems.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Thank you. I was about to say it was about \$14 million to \$17 million but the secretary, in his enthusiasm, has just said to me that it was \$14 million. So we halved what you spent. That is good. What a great government.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Given that there are about 57,000 people on the waiting list—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: For public housing?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Yes, for public housing, and given that we ran a social and affordable housing inquiry back in September 2014, when will the Government respond to our report?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: In a sense we are because we have the report and we put out a discussion paper in November last year, before I became the Minister. And we have had the forum. I read your report. I think it is a good report and the recommendations were generally good. But I am busy trying to work out an effective social housing strategy for the Government. It goes a bit to what the Hon. Sophie Cotsis was asking because I am trying to drive a lot of energy and enthusiasm across a broad range of areas. I think the Land and Housing Corporation senior staff here would happily say, except I am telling you for them, that they are much more enthused than they were perhaps six months ago about getting some new and novel ideas. A lot of what was in your report was excellent and, hopefully, we will be able to get an announced strategy at some point.

However, I do not want to be pressured on that because some innovative ideas are coming forward from the private sector and the non-government sector at the moment.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Which is important? Our report is quite favourable in regard to non-government organisations taking over, and I think you have mentioned out-of-home-care services.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You talked about wraparound services in your report.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It is a generalisation but non-government organisations are not under the same pressures that State governments are under so they seem to do it better. It is great that there is accountability to the State structure. I have no problem with that. There is such an increased opportunity for NGOs. Virtually a year has gone by and it is now coming into the fifth year of the Government. The Housing portfolio has been under some very good Ministers—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: But not me.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: My point is we are wasting a lot of time when NGOs could be embracing thousands more people who are in need of housing and taking that load off the State, which would allow the State to focus on other areas where it could do other things. As you say, it could focus on some of the innovation.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Let us go through that, because that was a broad statement. First of all, FACS through the Land and Housing Corporation, as its particular arm, is doing a lot better work. That is not to detract from the NGOs. I do think we should still head towards more houses going into the NGO sector. Of the roughly 140,000 that we have in the social housing sector at the moment, about 26,000 sit in the NGO sector. Of course, in relation to your point about them doing it better, "doing it better" is an evaluation you are making from a particular perspective.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: To clarify, I mean maintenance, wraparound services and the holistic approach.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It has been a while for a cultural change. Traditionally, under the former Labor Government and—fair enough—even going back into the time of the previous Liberal Government and the former Labor Government back in the Wran days, this department through its various incarnations was simply about putting a roof over people's heads. They did not see the connection and that frustrated me as a local member for years. It frustrated me that they did not necessarily see what I used to think were basically psychological services. Now I too am more educated about these issues and know about wraparound services.

Organisations such as Link, St George and Evolve out in the far west do a great job, as do many of the others, because they focus on those additional services. In general they also do not have anywhere near the number of people to look after. There are a lot of lessons to be learnt from Land and Housing Corporation on both sides of the equation. I have to say on record that I think the people sitting at this table such as Anne Skewes and Paul Vevers and the other staff I have met are all now very keen and doing a great job, but they are facing a cultural change.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: There was a \$330 million maintenance backlog in social, public and affordable housing when we first started the inquiry.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That was another part of your report. You highlighted the problems with maintenance.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Is it the same or has it reduced?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is reducing. I will find out the figures for you. I do not know the answer to that. From what I have seen, they seem to have a far more proactive stance on trying to get that. Can I tell you, although the Hon. Sophie Cotsis will hate it—actually, I am not going to name him because he is a mate of mine—a former Labor housing Minister said to me once, "When you're short of a quid you cut the maintenance". Unfortunately, that is what Labor did over a number of years and that is why the maintenance backlog built up. As I said, he is a mate of mine so I am not going to name him.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What is the Government doing to ensure that local governments have affordable housing strategies in place including affordable housing targets right across New South Wales? Furthermore, will the Government commit to developing critical pathways to ensure that local councils are able to achieve those targets?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Sure. At the moment Penrith, Campbelltown and Blacktown councils are all putting to me that they can do far more in the social housing sector. They have land available. Some charity groups are also saying that. That is part of the overall equation, going back to what the Hon. Sophie Cotsis was asking me earlier. We are looking at all of those issues to see where we might get more social housing from, effectively leveraging off other people's land and assets.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: All of those things were raised in the inquiry.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It was a great inquiry.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Sadly, I would not have to ask these questions if I had a response to that report. Will the New South Wales Government recognise local housing as a form of infrastructure to enable proceeds from Waratah Bonds to fund new supply of social, public and affordable housing?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am not sure about the answer to that yet because obviously, as I said at the outset—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I suggest that is a question for Treasury because it deals with the disposition of funds from Waratah Bonds.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am trying to get as much housing as I can. I do not need to rely on other agencies to do that. I can be as innovative as I can possibly be with the inspiration of Anne Skewes and Paul Vevers and others such as councils and non-government organisations. We are doing everything we can. It is a big issue for us. I want much more social housing.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Coming back to operational hours and intake hours, as we know, a service can be staffed overnight—that is their operational hours.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Are we talking about women's refuges or homeless groups?

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Both. Of course it may not provide overnight overtake.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Sorry, I missed what you said then.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I was explaining to you the difference between operational hours and intake hours.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I thought I explained that before.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: No, you did not respond to that.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think I did. I explained it to you. You have just explained back to me what I explained to you.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Given the serious and complex nature of domestic violence, which you have admitted, was the provision of overnight intake services included as an assessment criteria as part of the Going Home Staying Home program?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I was not there. I do not know. But I have already agreed and there have been reports to say it, as you have said. The Auditor-General has highlighted that there were shortcomings. It should have been if it was not. We will have a look at it. Equally, you have to understand that each of these refuges operates in its own way. I do not think it would be good for government to constrain them. They have to be able to manage as best they can in their own ways. That is part of the problem.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, you have constrained them. Many have actually closed down.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is a lie. That is a very big lie and I do not accept that. I thought you were better than that.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I thought you were better than that. There were 76 before and there are 76 now.

CHAIR: Order! It is unparliamentary to accuse a member of lying.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It was mendacious then.

CHAIR: I ask you to withdraw that remark.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That was mendacious, Dr Faruqi. Your mendacity is unfortunately colouring you.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Do you know Blue Gum Housing, which operated as a stable and reliable community service in the Blue Mountains for 30 years—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am sorry. Say that again.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Are you aware of Blue Gum Housing?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have heard of it. It is up in the Blue Mountains, is it not?

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: It was literally forced to close its doors after 30 years.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: If that is right, then I would like to pursue that further because I was advised by the agency—I have the same concerns as you have about that.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: That is good to know.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is. Nobody in the Coalition, nobody in The Greens and nobody in Labor would want women's refuges to be closing. That is not on. But I was told that one or two of the refuges did close because others opened up because those old ones were not functional. They could not do the job. If this one does not fit within that, come and do what I said to you the other day you could do, which is to come and sit with me, talk to me and I will have a look at it with you. I am on the same page as you, Dr Faruqi.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, I am going to come and sit with you but it is your job to know all of this anyway.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Really? Every single little detail? You are lucky you are never going to be a Minister.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Since the Going Home, Staying Home program was implemented, and you are the Minister now so you cannot dodge the question, how many services in refuges—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not dodge questions, Dr Faruqi, but if you come and talk to me I am happy to work with you.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: —in the Sydney region currently accept a woman fleeing a domestic violence situation overnight?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Exactly the same number that did beforehand.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Could you give me the number, Minister?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Nobody at the table has the number off the top of their heads. I will come back to you on that. I will give you the detail. But they are exactly the same number.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Could you take that on notice and give me the number that accepts them and the number that used to accept them before the Going Home, Staying Home program?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes, I will.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: In the wake of the Going Home, Staying Home program, has there been a reduction in the number of beds available to women specifically facing and fleeing domestic violence situations, because we know that services that were originally dedicated only to women fleeing domestic violence now take women and in some instances men who may have become homeless because of other factors?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The advice I have is that there are more beds now available. Again, I am happy to have that discussion with you and give you the numbers.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Could you take that on notice and give us the number of beds available before and after?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: You have said that there have been issues with the program—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The transition.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: —as highlighted by KPMG. There are many of them. How do you propose to deal with the situation not just for other programs but also for this particular program, because those issues have caused an impact on the ground? Will you commit to putting in more resources to fund more women's refuges?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The underpinning presumption of your question is that there are fewer services. What I am saying to you is the department advises me that there are not fewer services; there are actually more beds available. Let us deal with that first and, as I said, I am happy to have that discussion with you. I thought we were having a meeting last week to discuss all this.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, it is not just about the beds, though. Domestic violence is much more than just beds.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: It is providing wraparound services to women.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I agree totally.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: As I travel around the State, the story I am hearing is quite different. Maybe it would be good for you to travel around the State and talk to all those services as well.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: That is outrageous. I do not think any Minister has been more around the State than this Minister has.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Dr Faruqi, I do not want to argue this because I think all sides should have a real focus on trying to make sure that women fleeing domestic violence and children fleeing domestic violence have every facility that is necessary. I appreciate that there were some concerns from some of the established refuges, particularly—and I can understand this and I am sure you could—when there was a change of management to those refuges. The beds were still there but there was a change of management, and of course people felt, as with any change, a bit aggrieved. But when I have been talking to women's refuges—and I was at another one recently only a few weeks ago—the woman in charge said to me she thought the services were now far more connected and far better than they were before the Going Home Staying Home changes.

Having said that, she also acknowledged that the way it was done perhaps could have been done better. I am happy to work with you on that because I think the Government, the Labor Party, The Greens and the Christian Democratic Party would all want women and children to be as protected as they possibly can be and to have the opportunities for wraparound services. I am with you 100 per cent on that, but please do not abuse me about it. Come and talk to me about it.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I am sorry, Minister, I have not abused you.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do not accuse me either, because that is not my scene.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I have neither abused nor accused you.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I can tell you I am very committed to this area and I feel aggrieved that you are saying that.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: It is really important to talk further on this.

CHAIR: Order!

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, I have one last question. Within the KPMG report—and I know you have acknowledged that there were many deficiencies in that process—the one deficiency I am concerned about is the issue of engagement with stakeholders. It is concerning that the report says that only 40 per cent of stakeholders who were surveyed considered that they were being listened to. Will you set in place any specific processes to make sure that the people who are going to be affected, the front-line workers, will be engaged in a further process to evaluate on-the-ground impacts?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have acknowledged all that again. Going forward, though, there are lessons for both sides of politics about when you are going to make changes, particularly in areas where you are going to have contestability. Contestability in this case was probably necessary but it also had some negative consequences. One of those consequences was that on-the-ground services that otherwise had fabulous connections with each other and were working together and exchanging ideas and people found suddenly they were pitted against each other. Looking back on it, that has to be one of the big lessons. As a government, because we are tasked with using taxpayers' dollars sensibly, we still have to have some sense of contestability but you also have to understand that in a social justice area you have to be really cognisant of the impact on the ground of those connections on the local area.

The answer is: Yes, I have asked the department and I think they all agree—there is argument about that. As we go forward on some of the issues—the ones the Hon. Paul Green raised about how we are going to deal with community housing and others, such as what we are going to do with some of the non-governmental organisations [NGOs] doing out-of-home care as contracts come up—my view is that we take it a bit slower, a bit steadier and a bit more sensitively, listen to people and try to respond as we go forward while still acknowledging we cannot just throw money at everything. We have to get it right and be careful with taxpayers' dollars.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and your officers for attending this morning. We appreciate your participation.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Thank you.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.