



Minister for Community Services

QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon R M Parker MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

The number of projects currently funded under the Community Services Grants Program.

ANSWER:

There are 920 projects currently included in the Community Services Grants Program.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon R M Parker MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

The number of families currently participating in the Brighter Futures program, the number of families on the waiting list to participate in the program and the average length of time that families are on the waiting list.

ANSWER:

There are currently around 2,800 families engaged or participating in the Brighter Futures program.

There is not a waiting list for the Brighter Futures program. It is anticipated there will be up to 4000 families engaged or participating in the program by June 2009.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



Minister for Community Services

QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon R M Parker MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

“Given there were 197 early intervention caseworkers and 57 early intervention manager caseworkers as at 8 May 2008, how many additional caseworkers have you recruited since that date?”

ANSWER:

The figure of 197 Caseworkers applies to an earlier date. As at 1 May 2008 there were 253 Early Intervention Caseworkers and as at 18 September 2008 there were 298 caseworkers in early intervention positions, representing a net increase of 45. This increase was achieved by external and internal recruitment and staff transfers.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



Minister for Community Services

QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon M Ficarra MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

1. Why the Productivity Commission Report on Government Services indicates that the cost of preschool education in NSW is the highest in the country.
2. Could the Minister provide the internal statistics from the Department that show that the preschool participation rate is 88%?

ANSWER:

1. Data on the median weekly preschool cost in the Productivity Commission's Annual Report on Government Services *appear* to indicate that preschool costs in NSW are far higher than those in other states and territories.

These figures are to be treated with caution.

The Productivity Commission acknowledges this by stating "the estimates are not based on standardised measures of child age, hours of service provided or preschool service delivery ...".

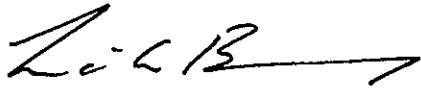
A key determinant of the average weekly cost is how many days a child attends preschool.

It is not possible to know from the Productivity Commission information whether NSW's costs appear higher simply because more children in NSW attend preschool for more days or hours per week than, say, children in Tasmania or Western Australia.

The Commission also notes that "Fee variations can ... occur as a result of charges for additional services such as meals and materials ... (or) may reflect higher land values and rental fees in major cities".

It should also be noted that the data are based on parent reports of the types of care that they use. This means that it is also possible that parents using long day care services, which are more expensive than preschools, have incorrectly reported their costs as preschool costs.

2. The NSW population of children in their year prior to school is around 87,000. In NSW each year, community-based preschools cater for an estimated 48,000 children, Department of Education and Training preschools accommodate another 4,240 and some 24,700 children attend preschool programs delivered by qualified early childhood teachers in long day care centres. Combined this means some 88% of children benefit from preschool programs in their year prior to school.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

Reverend the Hon Dr Gordon Moyes MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

If the longitudinal study into the effectiveness of out-of-home care had been completed, if not, when it was likely to be completed and when would the results be released.

ANSWER:

The Department of Community Services has engaged Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago to work with the Department to complete a detailed study design and analysis of the Department's out-of-home care data of children in out of home care.

The study is expected to be completed by the end of 2013 and results will be released on a progressive basis as they become available.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon M Ficarra MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

Has the Department had any discussions with William Campbell College about their Nowra proposal?

Is the Department aware that there is a trial of a new concept in delivering out-of-home care?

ANSWER:

I have been advised that William Campbell College is a not-for-profit community service currently providing Out-of-Home Care under a Header Agreement in the Department of Community Services Southern Region. The service is currently caring for 21 children and young people in foster care arrangements in the Shoalhaven Local Government Area, and receives funding from the Department through fee-for-service arrangements under its Header Agreement.

As part of the Out-of-Home Care Expression of Interest process in 2007, William Campbell College submitted a proposal to expand its existing services in Southern Region.

The Expression of Interest submitted by William Campbell College was unfortunately not successful when considered alongside other proposals. I am informed it lacked detail in describing key elements of service delivery such as strategies for placement stability, and support strategies when transitioning children to different placement or support types.

Since advising William Campbell College that the Expression of Interest application was not successful, Departmental representatives have discussed with William Campbell College future funding arrangements that could meet the children's need for stability. These discussions will recommence when contract negotiations with short-listed agencies through the Expression of Interest process are finalised.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon R M Parker MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

What recommendations made by the Ombudsman over the past 5 years have not been adopted and why?

And

The dates of the Ombudsman's recommendations and when they were adopted.

ANSWER:

Over the past five years the NSW Ombudsman has released four annual reports about reviewable deaths and made the following recommendations:

NSW Ombudsman Reports of Reviewable Deaths in 2003-2004

A total of 18 recommendations were made to the Department and all were accepted. These recommendations were made in November 2004.

NSW Ombudsman Reports of Reviewable Deaths in 2004

A total of 22 recommendations were made to the Department and all were accepted. Four of these recommendations were about interagency practice; two were directed at the Child Protection Senior Officers Group (Rec. 9, 11), one at the NSW Government (Rec. 10), and one at the Department and its interagency partners (Rec. 12). These recommendations were made in December 2005.

NSW Ombudsman Reports of Reviewable Deaths in 2005

A total of 34 recommendations were made. Sixteen were made solely to the Department, four to the Department and NSW Health jointly, three to the Department and NSW Police Force jointly, nine to other departments, and two to the Human Services Chief Executive Officers. All of the recommendations made to the Department were accepted. These recommendations were made in November 2006

NSW Ombudsman Reports of Reviewable Deaths in 2006

A total of eight recommendations were made. Three were made to the Department and all were accepted. One was made to NSW Police Force, one to NSW Health, two to the Department and Health jointly and one to Department of Education and Training. These recommendations were made in December 2007.

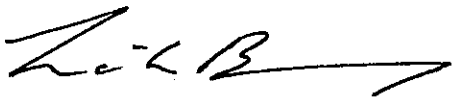
In each annual report, the Ombudsman provides an account of the work done by agencies to implement previous recommendations. Some of the recommendations made by the Ombudsman from one year are rolled into a new recommendation in a subsequent year. Many recommendations require a number of complex steps in order to be completed and some steps are ongoing in nature.

All of the recommendations made to the Department of Community Services over the past five years have been accepted and considerable work has been undertaken to implement the recommendations.

Each of these recommendations was formally adopted immediately following the release of these reports. The Department provides a response to the Ombudsman in the following February of each year accepting all of the recommendations and then work is commenced.

Twice a year the Department also provides the NSW Ombudsman with detailed reports on the progress of previous recommendations.

The Ombudsman's recommendations are publicly available in his Reports of Reviewable Deaths as are progress updates on the Department of Community Services' implementation of them.



Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon R M Parker MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

If the Memorandum of Understanding with the NSW Police had been completed,

And

When it was likely to be implemented?

ANSWER:

I am informed that the former Director-General of the Department of Community Services endorsed the draft Memorandum of Understanding in late 2007.

Following advice from the Crown Solicitor on aspects of the draft Memorandum earlier this year, I understand that NSW Police has sought further clarification from the Crown Solicitor.

Both NSW Police and the Department of Community Services are keen to resolve the matter as soon as possible following the Crown Solicitor's further advice. It is important to note that, although the formal Memorandum of Understanding has yet to be signed, officers of the Department and NSW Police continue to work together cooperatively in the exchange of information to enhance the safety and well-being of children and young people.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon R M Parker MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

What is the timeline for the implementation of the recommendations from the 'Breaking the Silence' report, on the understanding that the Department of Community Services is part of the interagency plan?

ANSWER:

The NSW Interagency Plan to tackle child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities is a five year plan (2006 – 2011) which builds on existing frameworks such as *Two Ways Together* and the NSW Government's *State Plan*.

As outlined in the Interagency Plan, the Department of Community Services reports implementation progress against a number of identified actions to the Ministerial Advisory Panel, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Cabinet.

The Department is progressing all the actions for which it has lead responsibility and has committed additional resources to work on progressing location specific actions. In addition, the Department has commenced work on proposals for further development in which the Department has a role.

As a committed partner to the Interagency Plan, the Department of Community Services continues to work with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and other interagency partners to progress the Plan actions.

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Linda Burney MP
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QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon R M Parker MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

How many of the 1,000 applications received from Indigenous people in 2007/08 were employed by the Department of Community Services?

ANSWER:

There were 94 offers of permanent employment accepted by the applicants for Aboriginal Caseworker positions in 2007/08.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon M Ficarra MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

For an update on the recruitment of the 1,025 additional caseworkers established under the reform, whether the 213 vacancies from prior to the reform have been included and for a breakdown on what percentage is filled on a full time or part time basis.

ANSWER:

The original enhancement package announced in December 2002 included 875 caseworkers. An additional 150 Out-of-Home Care positions were announced in 2006.

In addition the Department has created a further 62 permanent caseworker positions in Joint Investigation Response Teams and Intensive Family Based Services, and 73 temporary positions in the Helpline and other program areas, bringing the total to 1,160 new positions created since July 2003.

Recruitment has aimed at filling the new positions and any underlying vacancies. At the end of September 2008 the Department had 2,442 caseworker positions of which 8.9 per cent were unfilled.

In 2007/2008 a total of 644 caseworker candidates accepted permanent positions and ongoing recruitment is continuing.

Of the staff employed in these caseworker positions at the end of September 2008, 88.4% were full time and 11.6% were part time.

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Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon C Robertson, asked the Minister for Community Services –

What is the cost of the Review (of the NSW Children's Services Regulation 2004) and what is the report date?

ANSWER:

Total cost for the review is expected to be \$266,600. This comprises \$105,600 in 2007/08 to undertake an economic analysis of care ratios for children under the age of two, and an estimated \$161,000 in 2008/09 for development of a Regulatory Impact Statement and public consultation, including 15 regional briefings, a number of parent focus groups and an on line survey.

A draft Children's Services Regulation, and accompanying Regulatory Impact Statement, should be available for public comment in 2009 and it is proposed that the new regulation will come into effect during 2010.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon R M Parker MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

1. The number of non-relative adoptions currently being sought
2. How many applicants for an Australian child have been waiting more than 12 months and how long they have been waiting?

ANSWER:

1. As at 22 October 2008, there were 429 intercountry adoption applications in overseas countries awaiting allocation of a child and 32 approved adoptive families awaiting placement of a child from NSW.
2. There are a very small number of children across NSW whose parents are requesting that their child be adopted.

When a parent or parents relinquish a child for adoption, they can nominate the prospective adoptive parents for their child from a number of profiles of families provided to them by Adoption and Permanent Care Services. This means that there is no waiting list as such, because the choice of family for an adoptive child is not determined by the period of time since a family has been approved to adopt a child.

Out of the 32 families approved for placement, 7 families have been in that pool for more than 12 months. Of these 7, one family has been approved for more than one year, three families for more than 2 years, and three families for more than 3 years.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon R M Parker MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

The cost to the Department of Community Services of maintaining displaced staff and the length of time each of these employees has been on the unattached list.

ANSWER:

Currently the Department of Community Services has four displaced staff. None of the four meet the criteria to be declared excess at this stage and are therefore not on the excess list.

Two are in alternative temporary appointments within the agency (one on a higher grade). The first of these is a substantive Clerk Grade 4 (Max) who works part time and is currently acting part time in a Clerk Grade 4 (Max) position, so there is no salary differential. Her current part time salary is \$22,680. The second of these is substantively a Clerk Grade 6 (Max), the annual salary of which is \$67,448. She is relieving in a Clerk 9-10 position at level 3 (Min 10), the annual salary of which is \$84,738. This is a difference of \$17,290.

The third employee is on a six month trial placement in another agency. She is substantively a Clerk Grade 8 (Max), However, there is no current salary liability to the Department of Community Services as she is in the employ of another agency.

The fourth employee has only recently been displaced and is about to be issued with a formal letter advising her of her status. She is currently being considered for a permanent appointment in another agency. She is substantively a Clerk Grade 8 (Max) the annual salary of which is \$76,896.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon R M Parker MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

In the 2007/08 year how much was spent on salary packages for senior executive services?

ANSWER:

In 2007/08, \$6,243,155 was spent on the salary packages of officers appointed to the Senior Executive Service.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon M Ficarra MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

Confirmation of a \$480 donation to the election campaign for Mr Bob Debus by Ms Mason.

ANSWER:

NSW Community Services Director-General Jennifer Mason confirmed she had purchased four tickets to an official retirement dinner for MP Bob Debus at a total cost of \$480.

Mr Debus was a personal friend of longstanding for whom Ms Mason had once worked, and the dinner was the only event held on his retirement from State Parliament.

It is understood profits from the dinner were later used to help fund the 2007 election campaign of Mr Debus' successor in the Blue Mountains seat.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon M Ficarra MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

Confirmation of a meeting held on 9 October 2008 regarding what will comprise a significant event to be recorded on the childcare centre register.

ANSWER:

That is not correct. Decisions regarding what will comprise a “significant event” to be published on the DoCS website were made prior to the launch of the website on 4 September 2008.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

Reverend the Hon Dr Gordon Moyes MLC asked the Minister for Community Services

—
What are the number of allegations against paid staff in the Department for breaches of procedure or policy particularly by frontline staff such as caseworkers, under different categories, for example, child mistreatments, inappropriate treatments and assaults of any kind; the number of investigations actually substantiated; the number referred for follow up to the NSW Police and Director of Public Prosecutions; the number of investigations finalised and still pending and what kind of penalties were imposed?

ANSWER:

To fulfil its obligations under the *Ombudsman Act 1974*, the Department of Community Services conducts investigations of reportable conduct regarding employees, who are defined under Section 25A (1) of that Act to include any individual engaged by the agency to provide services to children, including foster carers as well as salaried staff.

“Reportable conduct” is defined under the *Ombudsman Act* as

- (a) any sexual offence, or sexual misconduct, committed against, with or in the presence of a child (including a child pornography offence), or
- (b) any assault, ill-treatment or neglect of a child, or
- (c) any behaviour that causes psychological harm to a child [Section 25A(1)].

Between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2008 there were 17 investigations commenced of alleged “reportable conduct” involving salaried staff.

Details of allegations against employees are provided in the Annual Report.

All misconduct (including reportable conduct where the investigation finds that there is sufficient evidence to support the allegation of reportable conduct), is referred for consideration of disciplinary or other action under the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act 2002* and associated personnel procedures.

There are currently seven formal disciplinary matters being managed by the Department.

In any cases of criminal conduct, a referral is made to police and all cases of staff misconduct involving corruption are also referred to the Independent Commission Against Corruption. Alleged abuse by a staff member is also referred to the NSW Ombudsman, under the *Ombudsman Act 1974*.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon Ian Cohen MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

1. Under the new preschool funding Resource Allocation Model introduced for the 2008/2009 financial year, how many preschools have received an increase in funding and how many have had their funding held at the 2007/2008 level?

ANSWER:

390 preschools have received an increase in recurrent funding and 365 were held at their 2007/08 recurrent funding levels.

Some preschools are currently having their funding reviewed and may still receive an increase in 2008/09.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon Ian Cohen MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

2. Is the Department of Community Services monitoring the impact of the Resource Allocation Model on preschool fees, particularly for those parents who want more than 2 days preschool per week? If so, can the Department provide details of how it will monitor fees?

ANSWER:

Information on fees and attendance patterns in a representative week has always formed part of the annual reporting requirements of the Service Agreement between each funded children's service and the Department of Community Services.

Each year, data is collected from all the Department's funded children's services, including questions relating to the fees charged. Services are asked to report on the fees charged by the hour for the age ranges of under 3 years and 3-6 years.

In previous years, services were asked to report on the fees charged depending on the income level of parents. From 2008 services are asked to report on the maximum fees charged to three target groups:

- Non-Aboriginal parents without Health Care Cards
- Non-Aboriginal parents with Health Care Cards
- Aboriginal parents


This will assist the Department in monitoring whether identified target groups (low income parents, Aboriginal parents) are receiving reduced fees.

The data collection process is currently underway. Once it is completed it will be possible to compare pre and post preschool funding model data to monitor the impact of the model on fees.

It should be noted that the data collected under the previous process had some quality issues and therefore a comparison of all Department of Community Services funded preschools may not be possible.

No data is collected on whether preschools charge different fees for parents who want more than two days of preschool a week.

The Department of Community Services considers that the actual fees charged by preschools are a matter for the individual service and the relationship between fees charged and the days of attendance is also a matter for each organisation to monitor.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon Ian Cohen MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

3. Why is the Government focused on additional places when there are many preschools with vacancies?

ANSWER:

The aim of the Growth Phase funding under the Preschool Investment and Reform Plan is not just to create additional places, but to also improve the utilisation of existing places by addressing barriers to access.

Vacancies in preschools may occur for a number of reasons. For example, families may have difficulty accessing the services physically (lack of transport) or financially (cost), or the local demand may be for long day care rather than preschool places, or families may simply be choosing not to use a particular service.

Agencies selected under the Growth Phase Expression of Interest process will do planning and consultation across identified planning areas to determine the best way of improving access to existing places and create new places where they are required. As part of this process, agencies will work with preschools on developing strategies to manage and fill vacancies to increase the take up of under-utilised places in existing services.

According to the Department of Community Services' numbers, even if every current place was fully utilised, there would be a need to create additional places to accommodate current and future child populations in key locations.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon Ian Cohen MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

4. How will the NSW Government's commitment to increasing participation in preschools match the Commonwealth Government's commitment to 15 hours per week preschool for all children in the year before school?

ANSWER:

The Commonwealth's priority on early learning for four year olds is consistent with the work already underway to implement the NSW Government's Preschool Investment and Reform Plan (PIRP).

It is a welcome opportunity to work with the national government to achieve the PIRP commitment to ensure that every four year old in NSW can access a quality, age-appropriate preschool program for 2 days per week in the year before they start school.

NSW has already undertaken major reforms to the funding of preschools to improve access and affordability for families, and this provides a sound base on which to plan for new Commonwealth investment in this area.

There are current discussions between senior State and Commonwealth officials about how the Commonwealth's investment will build on the PIRP.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon Ian Cohen MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

5. Will the Minister undertake to adopt for her own portfolio a transparent, publicly accessible reporting regime for the funding and implementation of the Actions in the NSW Interagency Plan To Tackle Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities: 2006 – 2011, including a publicly available annual report covering at least:

- a. the amounts and sources of all resources for each of the Plan's Actions relevant to the portfolio;
- b. the results to be achieved through these resources;
- c. progress in achieving the results;
- d. if the results have not been achieved:
 - (i) the reasons for the failure to achieve them
 - (ii) the action to be taken to ensure they will be achieved in future.

ANSWER:

As outlined in the Interagency Plan, the Department of Community Services reports implementation progress against a number of identified actions to the Ministerial Advisory Panel, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Cabinet.

The Interagency Plan also notes that progress of implementation will be reported through the State Plan and *Two Ways Together* reporting processes.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon Ian Cohen MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

6. Would the Minister please identify for the Committee:
- a. the specific service measures in the 2008 budget papers which relate to the Actions in the NSW Interagency Plan To Tackle Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities: 2006 – 2011;
 - b. the specific Interagency Plan Actions that these service measures are intended to address;
 - c. whether these service measures involve new funding for these Actions, or the reworking of existing funding to respond to the Interagency Plan's Actions, or the continued rollout of funding already announced for other government initiatives which are consistent with the Interagency Plan's Actions;
 - d. which Interagency Plan Actions cannot be funded from the current budget allocations.

ANSWER:

The Department of Community Services actions under the Interagency Plan are funded through existing program areas with the exception of Safe Families, a program to be rolled out in five focus communities commencing in 2009.

Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon Ian Cohen MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

7. What is being done to ensure that the Canterbury area gains its fair share of the new funding for preschool places promised by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments?

ANSWER:

In calculating the new place allocation for NSW preschool funding, Australian Bureau of Statistics data was used to determine capacity allocations for each local government area. The number of 0-5 year olds per local government area and the number of licensed places available within that local government area were compared. The Canterbury local government area was identified as being relatively under resourced in terms of places for children when compared to other areas and has therefore been allocated new places under the growth phase of the NSW Government's Preschool Investment and Reform Plan.

NSW has provided the Commonwealth with information to assist in its decision-making about the allocation of funding and places, and is working cooperatively with the Commonwealth to ensure that the State and Commonwealth funding is rolled out in a coordinated way.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon Ian Cohen MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

8. What priority will be given to this area, Canterbury, in provision of new services?

ANSWER:

The Canterbury local government area has been allocated new places for an additional 575 children under the Preschool Investment and Reform Plan. Under the growth phase, preschools in the Canterbury local government area will be provided with development and support services to assist them to increase access and attendance of children in existing places and to establish new ones.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



Minister for Community Services

QUESTION ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Hon Ian Cohen MLC asked the Minister for Community Services –

9. Exactly how many additional places will be available in Canterbury and when?

ANSWER:

The Preschool Investment and Reform Plan growth phase allocations have identified new preschool places for an additional 575 children in the Canterbury local government area. Places are expected to roll out by 2009/10.

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Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services