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GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 3

Tuesday 14 September 2010

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

THE LEGISLATURE

The Committee met at 4.45 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. J. G. Ajaka (Chair)

The Hon. R. Borsak
The Hon. A. Catanzariti
The Hon. G. J. Donnelly

Ms C. Faehrmann
The Hon. D. T. Harwin
The Hon. C. M. Robertson

PRESENT

The Hon. Amanda Fazio, *President of the Legislative Council of New South Wales*

Department of the Legislative Council
Ms L. Lovelock, *Clerk of the Parliaments*

Department of Parliamentary Services
Mr K. Smith, *Acting Executive Manager*

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: I declare this hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2010-2011 open to the public. I welcome the President, the Hon. Amanda Fazio, and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Legislature. The Committee has resolved that questions will be, first, from the Opposition and then from crossbench and then Government members at 20-minute intervals. I refer witnesses, the audience and members of the media to my earlier statement about procedural matters, such as the broadcasting of proceedings.

The House has resolved that answers to questions on notice must be provided within 21 days or as otherwise determined by the Committee. The Committee has not varied the 21-day time frame. All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. I remind the President that she does not need to be sworn as she has already sworn an oath to her office as a member of Parliament.

LYNN LOVELOCK, Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council; and

KIM SMITH, Acting Executive Manager, Department of Parliamentary Services, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Legislature open for examination. As there is no provision for the Minister to make an opening statement, the Committee will now commence with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Madam President, have you approved the employment and payment of any additional staff to Government or crossbench members of the Legislative Council from the Parliament's budget over and above their entitlements as set down by the Parliamentary Remuneration Tribunal since your election as President?

The PRESIDENT: No.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: During the past financial year obviously considerable effort has been put into marketing the Parliament as a venue for commercial events. What was the income from functions in the last financial year and how does it compare with the 2008-09 financial year?

The PRESIDENT: I might ask Mr Smith to answer the question.

Mr SMITH: In relation to the current revenue from catering activities, this year there was an increase—

The Hon. DON HARWIN: When you say "this year" do you mean the 2009-10 financial year?

Mr SMITH: That is correct. For the 2009-10 year there was a 7 per cent increase in top-line revenue. That equates to a margin contribution of approximately \$172,000 over the previous year, the 2008-09 year.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Mr Smith, what are you projecting will be the likely result for the year to come? Are you expecting that will increase further?

Mr SMITH: We have a small increase factored in. Given that it is an election year, we expect that there may be some small downturn, but the budget that is set for 2010-11 has pretty much the same top-level revenue for catering activities.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I refer you to Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 1, page 1-8, Service Group Statements, Community Access. In 2010-11 the service group is forecast to conduct just 90 education programs, a reduction from 102 conducted in the 2009-10 financial year, which was itself a drop from the 120 conducted in the 2008-09 financial year and 128 in 2007-08, which represents a decline of nearly 30 per cent during the term of this Parliament. What are the reasons for the ongoing decline in the number of programs conducted?

The PRESIDENT: We might take that question on notice and get you a detailed response, Mr Harwin.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: If you are taking that on notice could I ask you also to consider the following. Total expenses for these programs are rising, with the budget in the financial year 2010-11 allocating an additional \$528,000 over the amount originally allocated for the service group in last financial year's budget. Obviously staff expenses represent part of the increase and that is a flow-on from the decision that we are bound to implement, but I would like information on what accounts for the rest of the increase.

The PRESIDENT: Certainly we will provide you with that information, but I would like to say that there has been no downgrading of the services provided by our education department. They are still regarded by me and the staff of the Legislative Council and the Department of Parliamentary Services as being a core activity of Parliament and a very valuable one both in terms of the programs they run for schoolchildren and those they run for adults, such as A Little Night Sitting. I also believe the programs we run with the resources we have in this Parliament compare more than favourably with the programs run by other State Parliaments. We have discussed this at Presiding Officers and Clerks conferences. As well as the programs we run, we provide resources to teachers to run classes on the Parliament and democratic processes if they are located in areas that would make it problematic for them to come in. We also provide some outreach services. I will get you more details but there certainly has been and is no intention to downgrade the education section.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Last year I raised the proposal for disabled access to the public gallery of the Legislative Council Chamber. What progress has been made on this issue over the past 12 months? I note that there is no mention of funding in the capital works budget. Mr Ward stated last year that the estimated cost was \$500,000. Is that still the case?

Mr SMITH: I understand that we are pursuing funding for those works. We are currently seeking \$1.28 million to do that. Our funding bids, of course, go to Treasury for consideration and are ranked against other bids that are in. We intend to strongly present our case for funding for the upgrade.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Was a capital works application sent to Treasury?

Mr SMITH: Yes, it was.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: But we were unsuccessful?

Mr SMITH: Yes.

The PRESIDENT: In the interim, if we have people who are wheelchair bound and want to come in and watch the proceedings we usually make arrangements for them to be seated in the President's Gallery so that they have access.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Further to the statement you made to the Parliament last week, Madam President, relating to the disclosure of material to the media about internet usage, do you have any further information with which you can update the Committee?

The PRESIDENT: In relation to the matter in general, as you know, the Presiding Officers organised for Ernst and Young to look at a range of factors relating to the internet filtering system that was being used in the State Parliament. We have yet to receive a written report from Ernst and Young because it has taken them a little longer than we had anticipated to work through this, but I am able to say that, based on the advice I have received from Ernst and Young, no illegal content was accessed by anyone using the Parliament House server. The report that was referred to in the media—which I must say I still do not have a copy of—could well be regarded as being overzealous. I will give you a few reasons for saying that.

It is true that accessing one page on the Internet can show up to 40 or 50 hits on an adult site, and that has been verified by looking at the usage patterns not for individuals but the logs that are kept by the IT section, where one user may record 40 hits in three seconds—which is 40 hits while it takes a page to load. That is because of the way some Internet pages are structured. Every single thing on them, including every photo, every banner and every advertisement, is counted as a separate hit rather than just going onto the one page. We have been advised by Ernst and Young that of the top 72 websites that have been classified as being adult content, the main one was an advertising server that provides pop-up advertising. That was by far the largest.

It is hard to identify what has been accessed through that website because it is a dynamic site and the pop-ups change regularly during the day. It is difficult to determine these things. We have been advised that

some of the material that was categorised as adult was not adult. For example, one was a political blog for a specific part of the community. A number of blogs have been caught up and categorised incorrectly as adult. In particular, Ernst and Young found that websites that were promoting campaigns against pornography were classified also as adult sites. There were things such as personal email accounts, finance websites, sport, news, food and, in particular, photography—sites that were all categorised adult but none of which were adult.

Some of the matchmaking sites were classified as dating sites but, because photographs were posted on them, they were classified as adult sites. Again, that resulted in a problem with the categorisation of sites on the internet. We are awaiting a full report from Ernst and Young but that pretty much is as I reported the situation to the House. The information contained in these alleged audits that has been circulated around the place was unreliable, overrepresented the usage patterns of individuals, and I think it could be said that in a lot of cases it was not worth the paper on which it was printed.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I thank the President for her answer. My next question relates to another issue that has been raised by me before. I am interested to see whether there has been any progress in this area. Given the importance of community access, has any consideration been given to facilitating visits by the public on weekends, occasional weekends, or during the Christmas and New Year break? I note, for example, that both the Commonwealth and Queensland parliaments are open to visitors at the weekend. Have any costings been calculated to determine what funds would be required to provide more opportunities for citizens to visit Parliament at a time that might suit them better, such as those that I have nominated?

The PRESIDENT: At present we are involved in the Sydney Open day that is organised through the Historic Houses Trust. Usually we get a very good response. This year between 5,000 and 6,000 people came into Parliament on the Saturday. It is something on which I am quite keen because I have been looking at what is provided overseas. The German Bundestag is open seven days a week and at the weekend you can book with experts guided tours of the Austrian Parliament. I do not know how this reflects on my social life but, as someone who comes into Parliament House occasionally on the weekends, I am often saddened when I see tourists standing in the front of Parliament House looking in through the closed gate and fence and wondering what this building is.

It is something that we have talked about. We have not developed any specific proposals, in part because we would need to do a full business case on it. If we opened level 7 on the weekends the cost of air conditioning alone would be quite significant as there is only one air-conditioning circuit and we could not open one area and not others. I am all in favour of providing greater public access to the Parliament because it would help people understand the strength of democracy in New South Wales and it would help to demystify the Parliament. It is something we can look further at. We have adequate security controls in place in the form of the new gatehouse that was installed to make it easy to open Parliament House on the weekends. It would need to be worked out on a cost basis. If we proceeded with that it would need to be trialled to see whether the revenue that was brought in matched the outgoings, unless at some stage an extremely generous Treasurer wanted to fund a pilot program. If he or she did so, I would welcome such a trial.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: You referred earlier to air conditioning, which I imagine would incur significant costs. Do you have a ballpark figure for what it would cost if Parliament House was opened at the weekend or on non-business days?

The PRESIDENT: At current electricity rates it would be about \$97 an hour. We would need to charge tour groups something to go through Parliament House. In addition, we would have staff costs and additional security costs.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: For one day it would probably cost less than \$1,000.

The PRESIDENT: Just for the air conditioning. However we would need to factor in staff and security costs also. There would be some additional cleaning costs, but most tour groups that go through Parliament House are pretty tidy.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Is there an impact on the Parliament's budget when the Premier decides to increase the number of ministerial staff? I note, for example that page 11 of Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 2, forecasts an increase of \$3.8 million in administrative support for the Government—that is, for media advisers, speechwriters and other ministerial staff—next financial year. Does that impact in any way? Is there any impact from that increase on the budget of the Parliament?

The PRESIDENT: There is no real cost to us because the Executive Government, as opposed to the Parliament, has to fund that. There is a finite limit to the number of advisers, et cetera, that one can squeeze into a ministerial office. We do not give them access to our parliamentary intranet and there are a few additional costs, such as extra security passes being issued and that sort of thing. However, it is not great impost on the Parliament.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: A curious and probably esoteric issue, which a reader of the budget papers might pick up, relates to page 1 of Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 1, which notes a significant reduction in the assets, both current and non-current, of the Legislature. What was the reason for the revision of the land and building non-current assets—down 10 per cent from \$139 million to \$124 million? Is it simply the difference in land valuation, or is it the age of the asset? Is there an explanation?

The PRESIDENT: I will ask Mr Smith to advise you on that issue.

Mr SMITH: You are correct: a land valuation was done at the end of the 2009 financial year that significantly down valued the land. There has also been a reduction in cash holdings. The current assets are down due to reduced cash holding, but the significant item that brought down the non-current assets was that land revaluation.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: During the past financial year the Parliament appointed a twinning project coordinator. Could you outline the objectives of the twinning project and the process that you went through to meet those objectives? As I understand it, this is an externally funded program. Could you also confirm that?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, that is right. As part of the twinning program of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association [CPA], the New South Wales Parliament has partnership agreements, commonly referred to as twinning agreements, with the parliaments of the autonomous region of Bougainville and the Solomon Islands. The New South Wales Parliament has a long history of working with parliaments in the Pacific region, and in particular with the National Parliament of Solomon Islands. The 2007 CPA arrangement formalises that relationship with respect to the Solomon Islands and Bougainville.

In June 2009 the Parliament made an application to AusAID under its Pacific Public Sector Linkages Program for funding to support the twinning activities with the Solomon Islands and Bougainville. The funding application made specific reference to the relationship between the New South Wales Parliament and the Solomon Islands and Bougainville parliaments under the auspices of the twinning program. The funding application was successful, and we entered into a funding agreement with AusAID in April this year for a three-year period. The funded activity is strengthening parliamentary institutions in the Solomon Islands and Bougainville. The total anticipated cost of the activity is \$1.17 million over three years, with \$844,356 being provided through AusAID and the balance from the participating parliaments. Through that AusAID grant we have employed somebody to be the twinning coordinator.

The funding provides substantial practical support for the participating parliaments. The objective is to build capacity and strengthen parliamentary democracy in the Solomon Islands and in Bougainville. The core of the activity is secondments and placement of staff between the parliaments aimed at strengthening the parliamentary processes. The activity is not aimed at the members of the Parliament, but at the staff of the parliaments. The New South Wales based project coordinator works closely with the Clerks of the Pacific parliaments to identify areas where staff will benefit from working closely with their peers in the New South Wales Parliament. Often people who have come from the Solomon Islands and Bougainville will be seen here in the New South Wales Parliament working with their equivalents.

Other elements of the activity include the establishment of a formal mentoring arrangement, technical and corporate support, collaboration on research and writing tasks, and the development of a framework to assist other parliaments interested in learning from the experience of the twinned parliaments. For example, in June Bougainville held an induction for its newly elected members—70 per cent of the members elected for the second term in Bougainville are new members. Even though the focus of our funding activity is on strengthening the Parliament through capacity building among the staff, co-funding from the Centre for Democratic Institutions enables a member of the New South Wales Parliament, the Hon. Diane Beamer, MP, and two staff, Les Gonyé, Clerk Assistant-Committees with the Legislative Assembly, and the project coordinator, Simon Johnston, to assist the Bougainville House of Representatives with its induction process.

I find it interesting that we have been assisting the Solomon Islands Parliament for quite a while and it felt it did not need any assistance with its induction training. That Parliament felt it had the internal capacity to manage it, which is the outcome we were hoping to achieve through this program. We have signed a formal agreement with Bougainville. The twinning program is working quite well and I think the staff in the New South Wales Parliament find it quite interesting to be involved because it is helping to establish these two emerging democracies on a sound footing.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Did the upgrade in either the security or IT systems over the past financial year result in any staff reductions in those areas?

The PRESIDENT: No, I am not aware of any staff reductions in those areas.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What has been the assessment of the operation of the new security arrangements as far as staff and public access are concerned?

The PRESIDENT: In relation to the gatehouse?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes.

The PRESIDENT: The capital security budget of \$1.4 million was allocated to the Parliament last financial year. The fund was utilised to improve the CCTV and access control through the parliamentary precinct and to provide security strengthening at Hospital Road at the back of the building. The cost of the gatehouse was \$1.576 million, of which \$980,000 was funded from last year's capital funds. The balance of \$596,000 was funded in the 2008-09 financial year. The objective of the new security gatehouse was to remove the screening procedure to outside the footprint of the parliamentary building. This has been achieved successfully. I have undertaken some research into parliamentary security systems overseas. They all are tending to make sure that screening is taken outside the footprint of the building because it is much safer not only for the members but also for employees in the building and visitors such as school groups. Any problems detected do not impact as much on the main building and also occur on a separate air-conditioning system, which is important to ensure that any contaminants do not circulate through the building.

The design solution of the gatehouse had to incorporate a number of challenges. That included the high volume of traffic; the constraints with the parliamentary precinct being State heritage listed; the diversion of services for sewer, stormwater and telecommunications; the retention of the Celtis tree, which is in the exit forecourt; and maintaining disabled access to the Speaker's Garden. The architectural features of the gatehouse, including the copper roof and the lath plaster wall finishing, were designed to try to fit in, and the use of travertine for the floor contributes to achieving aesthetic harmony. The flooring comprises material used commonly in public buildings like the Art Gallery.

The gatehouse project also addressed a number of interrelated issues and resulted in the following improvements. The installation of additional external cameras on smart poles across the street to address some ASIO recommendations following a major security review we held a couple of years past; the timely redesign of the Speaker's Garden to enhance accessibility and usability of the area—in the past it was more difficult for people with physical disabilities to use the Speaker's Garden—and the upgrading of lighting to the front of Parliament House in line with ASIO's recommendation and the Heritage Conservation Management Plan. One reason for improving the CCTV cameras was that the poor image quality was no good for identifying anybody who may attempt to vandalise or damage the front or rear of the building.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Have there been any serious security breaches in the Parliament over the past month?

The PRESIDENT: No, not that we are aware of. There were some in the past, but we have improved procedures. Whenever there is a problem, security procedures are reviewed comprehensively to make sure that we have ongoing solutions put in place.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Has any additional capital expenditure been planned in relation to upgrades or reconfiguration of members' offices after the March 2011 State election?

The PRESIDENT: That is an interesting issue, especially in relation to the Legislative Council. As we are all located within this building, we do not receive a specific budget allocation, unlike the Legislative

Assembly. We have to make do with the general maintenance funds for the whole building. It comes under the budget item as minor capital works for the whole of the Parliament and we have to manage any change to fit-outs for the Legislative Council within that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Have some funds been allocated for potential changes after March 2011, considering that there could be significant alterations needed after that date?

The PRESIDENT: Mr Smith will answer that question for you.

Mr SMITH: We have a provision set aside for the capital component of maintenance works, within which we include some minor changes to offices. We have been in discussion with Treasury on a preliminary basis that, should changes be required on a basis beyond what our current resources will allow, Treasury will provide a further allocation. We have an in-principle agreement with Treasury that if our funds are not sufficient to do that, it will assist.

The PRESIDENT: Currently we are developing a business case as part of the annual budget submission to Treasury for the replacement of members' and Ministers' furniture within Parliament House. I am all for heritage and maintaining heritage, but the fact that, in the main, members and their staff in this building are still using the original furniture fit-out from the early 1980s is probably not really adequate, particularly when the chairs provided were non-ergonomic and the desks were not adjustable and were provided at a time when the idea of having a computer on every desk was probably science fiction. We are developing a business case. We are hoping we obtain funding so that we can roll out new furniture and fittings for members' offices to make sure that they meet basic occupational health and safety requirements for the twenty-first century.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That is very good to hear. In non-current assets, the value of intangible items increases from \$31,000 in 2009-10 to \$884,000 in 2010-11. Can you explain this increase?

Mr SMITH: There are a number of initiatives underway to improve systems within Parliament. The most significant one is a capital allocation for the acquisition of some software. The software we are looking at is an enterprise resource planning [ERP] system that is currently used for human resources and finance purposes, but is about to run out of support—if I may put it that way. We have an allocation that will allow us to purchase that upgrade, which is a significant contributor to that \$884,000. There is some other software as well, such as an asset management system we are looking at. That is the main contributor to that amount.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you for coming along today.

The PRESIDENT: My pleasure.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: What training activity has the Department of the Legislative Council undertaken? What costs have been expended associated with that training?

The PRESIDENT: As you may be aware, the Legislative Council provides training and education for the Legislative Council members and their staff, for parliamentary staff and for other stakeholders. The training activities undertaken by the Department of the Legislative Council include training for members and secretaries/research assistants. In 2009 the Legislative Council introduced a new Legislative Council Procedure and Practice Course that is targeted to address the training requirements of new and existing members and their assistants. Whether they are referred to as secretaries or research assistants is up to individual members. This is now an annual training course.

The procedure course is offered to all members and their staff. However, the content is aimed particularly at the staff, due to the high level of interest they have expressed in training opportunities. The course supplements the existing one-on-one training that is already available to members and their staff on request. In 2009-10 the procedure course consisted of four one-and-a-half hour sessions, held between March and June, and the course was well received by the participants. It will be offered again in the new Parliament. In addition, procedure staff provided one-on-one training for new members and their staff on the business of the House that has been tailored to meet individual needs.

We also run induction training. Since its creation, the Department of Parliamentary Services has taken on responsibility for the induction of new members and their staff. The training and research unit, in conjunction with the Legislative Assembly, has worked with the Department of Parliamentary Services to provide an

induction program for new staff, electorate officers and other staff employed by parliamentary departments. Induction programs were held in November 2009 and May 2010. We also provide and run our own staff training for the Department of the Legislative Council. The department has a longstanding commitment to professional development for staff, which is reflected in the delivery of two training courses: the staff seminar program and a table officer training program. These two training programs were first offered in 2008 and are now delivered annually.

In 2009 the staff seminar program consisted of five one-and-a-half-hour sessions held over July and August. The training program is open to all staff of the procedure and committee offices. The table officer training program was open to Legislative Council staff who either work, or are likely to work, as table officers in the House. Four one-and-a-half-hour sessions were held over April and May 2009. Two further sessions were conducted in August 2010. We are planning more for later this year. We also had Parliament-wide information sessions that were held in August 2009 for staff of the Department of the Legislative Assembly and the Department of Parliamentary Services. The two information sessions provided an overview of the role and functions of the Legislative Council.

We also have commenced running external information sessions. In May 2010 staff of the department conducted the first Legislative Council in Practice information session. Due to popular demand, a second full-day session followed in June. The information sessions are intended for people who have a direct interest in the functions of the New South Wales Parliament. The target group is public servants who are required to prepare legislation or responses to questions on notice, or who participate in committee inquiries. It gives them a much better, well-rounded understanding of the processes of the Legislative Council which, as most members would realise, are quite different from processes in the Legislative Assembly.

The two Legislative Council in Practice sessions were attended by 89 people, with attendance charged at \$250 per person. The two sessions generated approximately \$16,000 in income after taking catering costs into account. These funds will be used to develop future information sessions and other community access and engagement initiatives. Evaluations of the two sessions showed that a majority of participants believed that the sessions provided practical information on the fundamentals of council practice and procedure. Participants also indicated that the sessions increased their ability to follow proceedings as they occur in the House. During 2010 committee staff delivered training workshops on participating in committee inquiries to the Council of Social Service of New South Wales [NCOSS], the Public Interest Advocacy Centre [PIAC], the New South Wales Young Lawyers, and Community Legal Centres New South Wales. We will run some further workshops in December 2010 with the Council of Social Service of New South Wales.

The idea behind the workshops is to let the staff of all those organisations know exactly how the parliamentary inquiry process works, how to draft a submission, and what to expect if they attend to give evidence. I think it is a really good way of making sure that everybody in the community has a good understanding of how to participate in inquiries. We want to make sure that it is not the amount of money an organisation has that determines how effective it can be in the committee process; it is the knowledge of the process itself. The training programs delivered by the department have all been developed and delivered by Legislative Council employees. Therefore, the only cost involved is staff time. That has worked very well. I participated in the one with the Council of Social Service of New South Wales. It was really very interesting.

Ms LOVELOCK: At some time in the near future we may survey members in relation to their interest in a number of lunch-time seminars that we are considering on matters that might be of interest to members. We might pay someone to come from outside and give a presentation on, for example, website design, if members are interested in that, and the use of social media that affect members when they are utilising them. The department is considering whether there are areas that members might want us to be developing to provide that type of information.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Madam President, do you have anything you wish to add to the twinning statement you made to the Hon. Don Harwin?

The PRESIDENT: I will tell you just a little bit more about the sorts of things we have been doing with the twinning program. I think it really is quite important work, which we have not spoken about very much in public previously. As I said, we signed a formal agreement with Bougainville. We have consulted with the Clerks and the staff of the Solomon Islands and the Bougainville parliaments to clarify the specific project activities to be conducted in the current financial year. The project coordinator travelled to Honiara to meet with

the Clerk and other staff of the National Parliament of the Solomon Islands. He was in Bougainville for signing the agreement and the induction course, so that was quite helpful.

We also put together the Bougainville House of Representatives Members Committee Workshop because the committee system that we use here in the Legislative Council is quite well developed. It has some real value if it is translated to the local environment of Bougainville and the Solomon Islands in terms of consultation. On 19 and 20 July, the project coordinator, Simon Johnston, together with staff of the Bougainville House of Representatives facilitated briefing sessions for members on parliamentary committees. The two-day session included a simulated public hearing and detailed examination of the committee inquiries process. The session was well attended and was well received by those who participated.

We have also had people participate in an inquiry that was held in the Solomon Islands into the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands [RAMSI] process, which involved travelling around from island to island doing consultations in local areas. Again, that was quite useful. You cannot automatically transfer our committee system, where we do a bit of phone conferencing but otherwise everyone comes to Sydney or we all go out to the country on a road show. That is difficult when you are dealing with countries that are made up of many islands.

The priority areas for activities in both the twin Parliaments were identified in the AusAID-approved activity project plan. The priorities for Bougainville include expansion of the Office of the Clerk to enable the office to provide improved procedural support; strengthening committee support, especially for the Public Accounts Committee; enhancing capacity of the Parliamentary Library; supporting implementation of the education program; and enhancing the capacity of Hansard to record the proceedings of the House. The priority areas of the Solomon Islands include establishing a procedure office to support the sittings of the Parliament; enhanced administrative support for committees; enhanced information services, including Hansard, library and intranet; implementation of a human resources management system; and development of information on the role and function of Parliament as part of a community engagement strategy.

The New South Wales Parliament is committed to working closely with the parliamentary strengthening initiatives in the region, such as the United Nations Development Program/Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands—they have a parliamentary strengthening program—the Centre for Democratic Institutions, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the La Trobe University Public Sector Governance and Accountability Research Centre. We are doing quite a lot to support establishing stable democracies in Bougainville and the Solomon Islands. Supporting stable parliamentary democracies has a lot of benefit not just for those particular countries but also for the region in general. The emphasis on public accounts committees came about as part of an emphasis that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association places on the strength of having independent auditor generals and strong public accounts committees. We follow that through as part of our work in the twinning programs. Ms Lovelock will talk a little more about that.

Ms LOVELOCK: As well as the twinning, we are also involved with some other parliaments in more general training. For a number of years we have worked closely with the Centre for Democratic Institutions and a funded unit that operates out of the Australian National University. We have done training for members and staff in a number of places. In East Timor we have done training with the members and worked on their standing orders. We have worked in Papua New Guinea specifically, rather than just in Bougainville. Also, we have a course here that was originally developed by Steven Reynolds in relation to committee practice, which attracts staff from throughout the Pacific region.

We also get some interest in that from organisations such as the World Bank, which has been attending to see how we operate that and has started funding people to attend that course. That has been held in the New South Wales Parliament for the past three years. These people come here, and our staff and some of our members address them. It has been a valuable and wide-ranging area. I am proud of the role that my staff play in not only delivering some of these courses but actually developing them. They are in very high demand. I get a lot of requests for our staff. For a small staff, they have an excellent reputation, and I am proud to say that these people are doing this work.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: I am probably out of order but I think the videoconferencing facilities that have been set up for the committee process have been an excellent investment for this Legislature.

CHAIR: You are not out of order.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Can you provide an overview of the purpose of the new running record and the *House in Review* publication? Can you detail the costs involved in their production?

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: The Department of the Legislative Council has recently developed two new publications to make the work of the Legislative Council more accessible to members and their staff, people who work in the New South Wales public service, the media and the wider community. I will not talk about them any more; I will let Ms Lovelock do that because they are her babies. She came up with them and I will not take the credit for them.

Ms LOVELOCK: Basically, there are two new areas. One is the running record, which is the system whereby you can see what is going on in the Chamber as it is occurring. Staff put the information into Lotus Notes, which people can then access through the website. That is available not only to people within Parliament but also to people outside. The large amount of positive feedback we have received on that has been very encouraging. It allows people to see in fairly quick time after it happens every event in the House. You can see what is being debated at the time.

It takes a fair bit of effort by the staff, but they are able to put on the system amendments that are received against bills. There are linkages so that if the House is debating a particular piece of legislation people can click on a link and look at what the legislation is about. They can also click on amendments to see what amendments are being proposed. It has been a valuable tool. The public service and ministerial officers have been thrilled by the access that they are able to get to that. It also means that members who must attend a meeting during the sitting can easily find out where we are up to at any given time. When I have had to be out of the Chamber I have find it useful to see what has happened and what point we are up to.

The other one is *House in Review*, which we publish at the end of every sitting week. Basically, it is a summary of the work that has been done in the House that week. It is written in simple English. The principle aim was for legislation but we give a quick summary of what the legislation is about and then we summarise briefly the position of the major parties and the Independents on the legislation. We have enlarged it a bit in response to feedback so we now include a little more about what the committees are doing and what petitions have been presented so that the public can have a better understanding of what is going on in the House and what laws are being passed. It has been a positively received initiative.

CHAIR: That concludes the hearing. I remind you that 21 days is the period for answers to any questions taken on notice. You may receive further questions on notice from members, and the secretariat will advise you of those. The Committee may hold supplementary hearings after 19 November but you will be advised about that.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: If we receive more questions on notice, do you mind if we contact the members who placed them on notice so that we can clarify exactly the information that they are seeking so that we can give them a more specific answer?

CHAIR: Yes. I am certain members would not have any problems with that.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
