

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 4

Friday 22 August 2014

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

UNCORRECTED PROOF

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. S. Mitchell (Chair)

Ms J. Barham
The Hon. G. J. Donnelly
The Hon. T. J. Khan

The Hon. C. J. S. Lynn
The Hon. P. G. Sharpe
The Hon. H. M. Westwood

PRESENT

The Hon. Gabrielle Upton, *Minister for Family and Community Services*

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: Good afternoon and welcome to the public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2014-15. Before I commence I acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I pay respects to the elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present. I welcome Minister Upton and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure in the important portfolio of Family and Community Services.

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 they must take responsibility for what they 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 the hearing, so I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they may make to the media or to others after completing their evidence 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 witnesses could only answer if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In these circumstances witnesses are advised that they can take the 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 or the Committee clerks. I remind Minister Upton and the officers accompanying her that they are free to pass notes and refer directly to the advisers seated at the table behind them. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning. Finally, I ask everyone to turn off their phones for the duration of the hearing. All witnesses from the department, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. I remind the Minister that she does not need to be sworn as she has sworn an oath to her office as a member of Parliament.

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

MANDY YOUNG, Acting Chief Executive, Aboriginal Housing Office, Family and Community Services,

STEPHEN MUDGE, Chief Financial Officer, Family and Community Services

KERRY BOLAND, NSW Children's Guardian, Office of the Children's Guardian, sworn and examined, and

JACQUELINE MAREE WALK, Chief Executive, Community Services, Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Family and Community Services open for examination. For the information of the Minister and the officers accompanying her, the Committee has resolved that the questioning of the portfolio will run from 2.00 p.m. until 4.00 p.m., with no questions from Government members. The questions will alternate between Opposition and crossbench members in 15 minute intervals. 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. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, how many intoxicated persons were admitted to the eastern beaches sobering-up shelter in Randwick?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The Government did a review of the sobering-up centres. I think that is in relation to your question. It was found that two of those centres were not affected but one of them, which was the mandatory centre in the centre of Sydney, was and so it will be continuing.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: But what is the number of intoxicated persons who were admitted to the eastern beaches sobering-up shelter?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: For those details I will ask the Secretary to comment.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The Secretary is struggling with his notes to see if he can find the figure. I think we may need to take that on notice and provide you with the number. We will have a quick look at the notes and if we can provide you with the number now we will, otherwise we will take it on notice.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Could you advise the Committee what was the total expenditure on staffing of that centre?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: We will take that on notice.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Do you have details or any figures on this centre?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: No, I am sorry; we do not have an accurate figure on the number of people who use the centre, so we will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: We have been told that only 10 people used that centre at a cost of about \$1.5 million.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Ms Sharpe, would you clarify which centre you are referring to?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: The Randwick centre.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The voluntary centre?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes. What we are seeking is the total expenditure on the staffing of the centre and the fit-out. We want to know whether you are still meeting the rental costs. We believe that only around 10 people used that centre and we are seeking clarification whether that is in the ballpark of what has been reported to us.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: We will take that on notice and get back to you as soon as we can.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Can you also confirm to us then whether you are still paying staff at the centre and whether you still paying rent on the building?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We will have to confirm that on notice as well.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Can you also provide us with information about what the plans are for the building given that you have just indicated that it will not be continuing?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes, of course.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, there has been a lot of discussion obviously about the Government's activities in relation to Millers Point. I am aware that one of the properties was sold last night for over \$1.9 million. You have been very clear in the media over the last day or so that with that money you will be able to pay for and provide three or four new properties. Are you able to give some details about where and when these properties will be delivered?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The sale of Millers Point is important. It is about putting the public housing system back on a sustainable footing. It has not been for a long time so to your direct question about where the proceeds will go, they will go into new buildings within the public housing system.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Where? What plans do you have?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Can I finish my answer—new buildings; it will go into capital maintenance and recurrent maintenance that has not been able to be funded—I emphasise that—and we will be able to do that with the sale of these properties at Millers Point. Now to your particular question—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So, Minister, you are saying here—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No, I want to clarify what the Minister has just said.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order: The witness is still answering the question and this member is persisting with her approach of simply attempting to bully the Minister. She should be entitled to answer the question without interruption.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: To the point of order: The Minister had finished that part of her explanation.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: She had not.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: To the point of order: The Minister had not finished her answer.

CHAIR: Order! The Minister can conclude the answer to the question she was asked by the Hon. Penny Sharpe.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Thank you, Ms Sharpe, and to finish my answer: the Land and Housing Corporation, which owns the property on behalf of the taxpayers of New South Wales, has an ongoing plan for maintenance, for new homes, for sales of property. In the budget you would see for this year, for 2014-15 going forward, there is a \$612 million commitment to construction and maintenance.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Thank you, Minister, I appreciate that. I want to explore the answer you have just provided. You have said repeatedly on the radio today that you will be able to provide three or four additional homes with the \$1.9 million from the property that was sold last night. You have just indicated to the Committee that there is a plan. Would you be able to provide the plan for where those new homes are going to be built and when they are going to commence?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: As I said before, there is a \$612 million commitment to the public housing system; then \$120 million of that will go into the build of new homes, \$207 million into improvements and \$284 million into maintenance, so there is a plan—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, let us just be clear: your ongoing claim—you have repeatedly said publicly—is that with the \$1.9 million that was raised from the sale of the property last night you are going to build three houses. You are now telling us that you might build three houses with that large bucket of money that might be available, you might provide maintenance, and you might provide an upgrade to new stock. Can you basically confirm for the Committee that the \$1.9 million from the sale of the house at Millers Point yesterday is not guaranteed to provide three new houses in Sydney?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The sale proceeds from Millers Point will go into the public housing system, it will go into maintenance and the build of new properties, the figure you mentioned—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It will not provide three new—

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order: The member is constantly jumping in when the Minister is answering the question. The Minister should be able to answer the question.

CHAIR: Order! I uphold the point of order. The Minister will be allowed to answer the question.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The figure you mentioned is an approximate figure for what it takes to build a new home in the public housing system. If you want further detail I will ask the Secretary to respond.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am clarifying that when you say you are going to build three new homes with \$1.9 million that is an approximate and a "might": you are giving an example of how the money will be used?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: This is a red letter year in the public housing portfolio. For the first time the portfolio is growing in size not shrinking. It has been shrinking on average by 800 dwellings a year for a decade. We are starting 759 new dwellings this year compared to 276 last year—

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: We have a very short period of time. I asked a specific question about—

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: —that and I would like to move on.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order: The Secretary is answering the question and should be entitled to without interruption from the member.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: And the Government has given up its time to provide information. If you wanted to have Government time to provide this information we would have been happy to provide it for you.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You are not entitled to control the answers. The Minister and witnesses are entitled to—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am entitled to ask as many questions as I can, that is the purpose of budget estimates.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: —answer the question, not for you to jump down their throats.

CHAIR: Order! The Hon. Penny Sharpe has asked a question, the Secretary is answering it.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: He is providing more information than I require.

CHAIR: Order! He is allowed to answer the question in the way he sees fit. You have asked a question and the Secretary is still answering it and should be given the courtesy to finish the response.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I will keep it quick. We are more than tripling the number of new starts this year: 759 compared to 270 last year and we are completing 443 homes compared to 359 last year. It is a portfolio that is growing in size and improving in quality because we are putting a 30 per cent increase in capital and recurrent maintenance in the portfolio as well.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, can you guarantee that there are not more inner city properties for public housing that you are planning to sell off, particularly in the Glebe Estate in Glebe, Surry Hills and Eveleigh?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Ms Sharpe, it is a very large portfolio. In the ordinary course of what Land and Housing Corporation does it plans for maintenance, sales and disposals within the portfolio, and for further details on the specifics of that I hand to the Secretary.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I do not think there are any plans to sell properties in Surry Hills or Glebe. There is a potential redevelopment in South Eveleigh that we would be happy to provide information about on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: As you are aware there is public housing there, there are plans through the Central to Eveleigh area and the residents are not aware that their housing might be about to be developed from underneath them. I would appreciate it if you could provide that. Minister, the Opposition and others are keen to know, given the wholesale sell-off of housing in the Millers Point area, what economic modelling has been done in relation to that decision?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I will ask the Secretary to answer that question.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: At the risk of sounding slightly flippant, the economic modelling is instead of selling three homes to buy one, which is the history of the portfolio in the last decade, we are reversing that. In other words, we are being far more strategic about what we sell for the reason that we want to use the assets of the portfolio to maintain or increase its size and increase its quality.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, can you inform the Committee how many households have been approached regarding the vacant bedroom charge?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The vacant bedroom charge, along with the amnesties that we have provided, is part of the approach that we are adding to the public housing system, which is to have a more fair and sustainable system. This is about ensuring that tenants in the system pay a fair amount of rent because when—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am aware of that, Minister.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: —they are putting resources back into the system.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: How many households have been approached in relation to being charged the bed tax?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: We will take that question on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Would you provide a break down by suburb?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I think we can. We will attempt to present the information that way.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Would you also provide us with information about how many households have chosen to relocate rather than pay the bed tax?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Will you provide your modelling in relation to the additional revenue you expect to be collected as a result of the bed tax?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We will take that question on notice as well.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, do you agree with the analysis from the peak body in the sector, Homelessness NSW, that under the Going Home Staying Home reforms 5,000 bed nights a year will be lost and 400 experienced workers will lose their jobs?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Are you referring to the Going Home Staying Home reforms?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I just said that.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: These reforms are important. These reforms enable more people and the growing number of homeless that we have in the New South Wales community to get the services they need, when they want and closer to home. They provide more money into the system. There is a percentage increase in the last budget delivered in June to homelessness services across New South Wales and that is important because what we know is that we have had a growing number of homeless over the last number of years and in the face of that we could not continue to do what we had done in terms of funding homelessness services across New South Wales.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Homelessness services for a long time over all governments have talked about the fact that they can only house half the number of people who knock on their door every night. Do you think it is a reasonable approach to blame those services for the problems of homelessness, which are largely out of their control, or that just moving the services around through changing their contracts will solve the homelessness problem?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: First, the services that are in the system across the State do an incredible job—I want to put that on the record—with a problem that we knew was growing.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: This is well documented.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: A good government gets on and reforms the system.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order: The Minister is answering the question and the member interrupts her again. The member should be called to order if she persists in interrupting the Minister as she answers the question.

CHAIR: Order! The Minister should be able to answer the question asked of her.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Responsible government, seeing that growing number of homeless people and understanding that we were not arresting the risk of homelessness, reforms the system. This is not a criticism of those service providers, they do a very good job, and they do the heavy lifting to provide services to the vulnerable in our community. Through this package there is more money, there are better services and they are being provided across the State where we know there are needs that are not being met under the current or former system of funding homelessness services.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: The substance of my question was the 5,000 bed nights a year that are going to be lost and the 400 experienced workers that will lose their jobs: Do you acknowledge that?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The important thing about these reforms is that we have better services. They went out to tender to get the best possible services to the people who need them. That is the way you get the possible services. There are more services being provided, more wrap-around services and more early intervention services. This is about being holistic to help people who are at risk of homelessness as well as those who might be accessing crisis services, which are equally important. This is a more holistic approach to homelessness services. For many of the districts across New South Wales there is more funding and more services. There are specialist services. This is a reform I am proud of because it is for once embracing the issue we saw, a growing number of homeless, and addressing it on the basis of evidence of the needs that were there with new packages, better services and more services into the areas of need across New South Wales.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Minister, can I just follow up on that? Can you outline what funding has been allocated towards women's refuges and what forecast amounts are identified for the Going Home Staying Home program? Do you have a projection for the next three years?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The Going Home Staying Home reforms include specialist services. I make that clear because a myth has been perpetuated that there are no specialist packages in the reforms, and in particular women's specialist service packages. That is a myth; it is not true. In fact, 80 of the 140 packages tendered for include a women's only or discrete response to women and children. There is that attention to their special needs and that is an important part of these reforms. The Secretary can comment on the specific details.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The number of women who will receive a service from the new system will increase by about 3 per cent and the number of families will increase by about 13 per cent. Most of the family groups that come into the system are headed by women. In response to Ms Westwood's question, Homelessness NSW also concedes this. It says that more young people, women and Aboriginals are expected to receive services. It is an expanded service system. The number of crisis and transitional properties that are available to women will increase, not decrease. A very important additional element is an increase in the funding for the Start Safely program, which is a two-year tapered private rental subsidy worth, from memory, an average of \$8,000 per annum. That will mean 2,000 households, largely headed by women, and 3,000 children will be accommodated each and every year. That is an expansion of capacity.

Ms JAN BARHAM: I would like some information about unaccompanied minors, particularly girls. There is concern about them in the city and in some regional areas.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The data we have indicates that about 1,300 12- to 15-year-olds move in and out of the crisis system each year. That is entirely unacceptable. Of them, 60 per cent are girls. It has been argued by the sector and providers in the sector for a long time that there is a need for us to better connect some of the elements of the service system in the work we do in the department in supporting children in out-of-home care. A proportion of these are our children, that is, children under the parental responsibility of the Minister. Each year \$9 million is allocated for more and better services targeting those 1,300 young people. We are working with the sector both through the peak bodies and individual services to co-design what an addition to the service system should look like to best meet the needs of those young people.

Ms JAN BARHAM: How many of those 1,300 are children in care?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I do not know, but if we have the data I will provide it. I think we do.

Ms JAN BARHAM: How much work has been done to address the causes of the increase in homelessness? What have you delivered in response to the Ombudsman's recommendations about policies for social housing, asset and portfolio management and estate management? Big changes are happening in the system, but there is no policy to direct those changes. It appears to be a wait-and-see approach that catches people by surprise. They were due in December last year or January this year, but we have seen nothing.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Are you talking about the Auditor-General's report?

Ms JAN BARHAM: I said the Ombudsman's but I meant the Auditor-General's report.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: You are referring to the Auditor-General's report on public housing. The agency provided a response to the Public Accounts Committee in early August giving an update on the implementation of the recommendations in that report. I am more than happy to provide that in a response to a question on notice.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I mentioned a number of initiatives previously, including the amnesties for unpaid or undisclosed income and property and assets, and the vacant bedroom charge. We have made our waiting list more transparent and properties at Millers Point are being sold. These decisions and actions are part of delivering a more sustainable housing system and ensuring that we have more and higher quality housing. That work has been undertaken in response to what have been long known and understood issues within the public housing system. It is important work that the Government must do. These are vulnerable people who deserve what we can give them if we manage this portfolio well. That accommodation should be age appropriate, accessible and modern, and it should be close to public transport. It must serve people's needs.

Ms JAN BARHAM: I appreciate that. However, many people are concerned that these measures are being done via media releases and are not governed by policy strategy and public consultation. There might be input from the public or the community sector that could help to guide these initiatives. The Auditor-General said that people deserve to know whether the Government intends to consult or has consulted and whether it will deliver on the recommendations. I will put a question on notice about that.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: An important part of that, which I have outlined, involves ensuring that we manage the assets well and that we make better use of the value in the portfolio. The things that I articulated demonstrate that we are making progress on that front.

Ms JAN BARHAM: We have seen the sale of properties, but we have not yet seen the delivery of new things other than the bedroom charge. We have asked questions but do not have answers about how many have been moved on. We want to know how this issue will be addressed across the State. Has specific funding been allocated to address Aboriginal homelessness? Can you assure the Committee that the people who have been allocated funds to deliver services will be appropriately trained to deal with culturally sensitive issues and to understand and show respect to the people they will encounter?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: There is a strong commitment in the Going Home Staying Home reform of services across the State to provide specialist women's services to groups such as the Aboriginal community and also to support people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who may be at risk of homelessness. I will ask the Secretary to address the specific details of how that is expressed in the packages tendered for and won by providers.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: There was a 17 per cent increase in Aboriginal homelessness between the 2006 census and the 2011 census. I do not know what base number of that comes off, but it is a lower increase than the increase in homelessness in the general population, which is running at about 25 per cent. However, Aboriginal homelessness is a significant problem, particularly in some areas of New South Wales. Of the 149 service packages, 79 specifically target Aboriginal clients. As many as 80 per cent of the clients are expected to be Aboriginal in some areas.

That means in turn that the service providers need to display the ability to be culturally competent in working with Aboriginal people, families and communities. Now, for the first time, there is an expressed expectation in the contract. The process of selecting lead agencies and their partners has regard to the organisation's ability to demonstrate that we can have confidence that it will be able to serve the needs of Aboriginal people. However, like all reforms, this is a work in progress; we have embarked upon it. It attracts a lot of attention at senior levels within the organisation.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Do the contracts require an Aboriginal staffing level or cultural awareness training? Governments have been poor in ensuring that cultural awareness training is undertaken. Some of the problems that arise in these services are the result of Aboriginal people not being treated respectfully because people do not understand the behaviour and communication modes that must be observed. Is that part of the contract? Can you make blank contracts available?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes, we would be more than happy to make available the terms of the contracts. I do not know the answer to your question. I do not know whether we control it as an input to tell us about the Aboriginality of the staff. I doubt it; we are more likely to be looking at the competence of the organisations, which goes to the cultural competence of staff, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to work with Aboriginal communities.

Ms JAN BARHAM: A bit of an input-output process.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I am happy to take it on notice.

Ms YOUNG: I have worked with our FACS colleagues on some of that. There are, within the contracts, outputs particularly around Aboriginal cultural awareness and providing for Aboriginal people.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Are we doing FACS as a whole and we can go anywhere?

CHAIR: Anywhere you want.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Within limits.

CHAIR: As long as it is relevant to the portfolio.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Do not worry; the Hon. Trevor Khan will be on you if you do anything wrong.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Out-of-home care accounts for more than half the total budget for community services initiatives and early intervention is only 16.5 per cent. Why is there not greater investment in proven outcomes, like early action or early intervention, when we know the research says that early intervention pays dividends, often in the very short term? It seems to be a real failing that no-one is doing the bleeding obvious.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Early intervention is incredibly important. I come back to the point I was making in relation to Going Home Staying Home. The earlier we can intervene to arrest risks of people's social issues, conflicts, health issues, the better it is for the community generally, in particular for those vulnerable people.

Ms JAN BARHAM: I appreciate that has been recognised in the homeless area, but with child protection issues, particularly around trauma, we know that the earlier you can address those issues the better chance you have of keeping a child out of more dangerous situations such as, possibly, the juvenile justice system and, later, jail. Can you give us an idea of the future direction, perhaps with greater expenditure on early intervention to try to bring the numbers down and even out some of the budget inequity?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I think you noted that there is a \$258 million commitment in this budget to target early intervention for vulnerable kids, young people families—that is, just under a 5 per cent increase in expenditure on those programs. I ask the Secretary to comment on other matters related to programs, particularly in relation to child protection.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I will invite Maree Walk to comment as well, as she has expertise that I do not have. You are right that \$1 in \$7 of the money we spend in community services is in what we term early intervention, although when you look at most of what we fund in that program area we are working with families in crisis already. Early intervention cannot be the task of this agency alone. We have to be able to harness a whole range of resources—the resources of people and families and their communities, number one, but the resources of our government and non-government partners particularly.

We are taking a good look at how we spend this money and the results we achieve for it, because, as the Minister said, \$258 million is still a very significant amount of money and we want it to be used as effectively as possible. We want to demonstrate the worth of it to the community, so that, in turn, we can argue for greater investment in this area. In the broad, before I ask Ms Walk to contribute, some of the problem here is collectively we are not able effectively enough to demonstrate a link between the investment that is made and the results that are achieved. Until we can do that, it is difficult to win more investment for the area.

CHAIR: Order! We will come back to this when Ms Barham has her next round of questions.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, you have indicated that all of the government-owned properties will remain open as a result of Going Home Staying Home, and I think that is some 1,300 properties. Are you monitoring how many beds are currently closed in those properties during the transition phase?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Where there are government-owned properties there are 1,300 of those in the system. They will still be available to service clients.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am aware of that. I am asking specifically whether at this point of time you are monitoring how many beds are closed during this transition phase.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The transition also will mean that some successful providers will bring additional beds to the system.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is fine. Can I clarify what I am asking, Minister? I have visited many services in recent times and I have witnessed that very important services providing crisis beds in the middle of winter, because of the uncertainty in relation to the transition process, are turning away clients and

closing their beds. They do not want to on take people when they do not know when they are going to go through the change. They have actually closed half the beds they had available. How are you monitoring that, if you are monitoring that? Can we get some figures on that? There are beds that have closed in the middle of winter in Sydney as a result of the transition process. I want to be given confidence in how that is being managed.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I ask the Secretary to comment.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We are managing the transitions at a district level. I would be deeply concerned to hear that people are being turned away simply because there is a perception of uncertainty.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am not blaming the services. They are concerned about taking on new clients, given the degree of uncertainty about what will happen to those clients, particularly the longer term services.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: They would know who the incoming provider is. In the period of transition, outgoing providers are funded at 60 per cent of their previous funding and incoming providers are funded at 40 per cent, so that the same level of funding is maintained in the transition period.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Do you accept that there might be some issues if people have lost their funding and they have to share the new lot of funding somehow in the transition? Are you confident that that is working and it will work?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I accept that we are all human beings and there are people who find it difficult to be leaving properties that they have operated services at for some time. They are professional and they have an obligation to the people we serve. We are happy to take any examples you have of where transition is not working well.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: But you are not actively monitoring the number of beds staying open during the transition process?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: At a district level, absolutely. Transition by transition we have approached both parties. We have tried to facilitate discussions between them. We have got very heavily involved precisely to help manage the risks in transition. The funding is available. We have had examples where outgoing service providers have left early and happily incoming providers—for example, Erin's Place Women's Refuge—have been able to step up much earlier than expected. There have been some bumps along the way, but the funding is there, the transition is clear and there should be no reason for an outgoing service provider not to take in clients.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Could I give additional information?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No, that is fine at this point. I am happy for you to clear that up on notice. This process has been incredibly disruptive to services. Many of the services that have not been successful and are no longer going to be funded have been operating for many decades. Do you accept that those services have had a range of relationships and cooperation and coordination locally that has not always been reported? In particular the trust within the community has been built up over many years. I am thinking particularly of things like the safe houses out west. How confident are you that this process, with all of the promises being made, is not destroying some very good relationships that were efficient and gave the best service to clients? I particularly would like you to comment on how you believe some of those new services will build trust with the community, when the service they have been used to for many years has been defunded?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I have been concerned, and it has been disappointing to me, that for political purposes the Labor Party has gone out to spread myths about closing services. There has been an allegation that there are—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I do not want to get into semantics with you about—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order: The point of order is that the Hon. Penny Sharpe persists in interrupting the Minister when the question is being answered. If she does not like the answer, tough. But the Minister is entitled to respond and answer the question.

CHAIR: Order! The Minister is answering. She is being generally relevant and should be allowed to continue with her answer.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: It has been disappointing to me that there have been myths about women's refuges and other services closing when that has not been the case.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So when 200 people gather in Kempsey and say that their service is closing, it is not closing?

CHAIR: Order! The Hon. Penny Sharpe will come to order. The Minister has the call and shall be heard.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: This has created a great deal of stress in the community when, in fact, the reforms that we are bringing in will better address the needs of those who are vulnerable. I make the point that the Government has seen fit, and Family and Community Services has seen fit, to put out a myths and facts piece on the department's website to publicise that because I was concerned—our Government was concerned—that some of the myths that were out there were impacting—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Thank you, Minister. You have given up your time to provide this level of information.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Yes.

CHAIR: Order! The Hon. Trevor Khan has the right to raise a point of order.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: And my point of order is the same: This member cannot hold her tongue when the Minister is speaking. The Minister is entitled to answer the question. She is being generally relevant. The Hon. Penny Sharpe should be quiet whilst the answer is being given.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: To the point of order: The Government has chosen not to take an hour of their own time they had available in this Committee to provide the level of information that is their myths and facts sheet. We have a very limited amount of time to get through our questions. I am trying to be respectful and polite to the Minister. However, if she continues to use the opportunity to provide her answers as Dixers then I will feel compelled to continue to interrupt her. I have a lot of questions that we must get through. We are entitled to only an hour of questioning and that is why I am seeking to cut off the Minister when she strays into the territory of what I would consider to be publicly available information that we are perfectly capable of seeing on the website. She does not need to go through it with us.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Further to the point of order: The Minister is entitled to answer the question as long as she is generally relevant. I make the point again—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Do not give us Dixers.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I make the point again: If the Labor Party is unhappy with the answers that is a shame, but the Minister is entitled to give all of the answers.

CHAIR: Order! I uphold the original point of order moved by the Hon. Trevor Khan. As I have said many times already during this hearing, the Minister is entitled to answer the question that she has been asked. She is being generally relevant to the question she has been asked and she should be heard.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I would like to move on. Minister, there are eight girls under the age of 18 who will be leaving the Lillian Howell Project in the next six weeks. Where are you housing these young women?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The tender process leads to better services being provided—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: With respect, it was a very specific question about eight young women currently being housed by the Lillian Howell Project. I want to know where they are going.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Crucial services will be provided. The service I am referring to is an integrated service that is provided—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Are you aware that—

CHAIR: Order! The Minister can finish the answer. She is being generally relevant and she should be allowed to finish her answer.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: It is important, as Minister for this portfolio and as a member of the Government, to ensure that these vulnerable women and children are taken care of and are given the best possible services. Government agencies are providing crucial services—both small and large organisations—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So those eight young women—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order: My point of order is that this member continues to interrupt the Minister when the Minister is answering the question. The Minister should be entitled to answer the question. The Minister is entitled to answer the question as long as she is being relevant and she should not be constantly interrupted in the rude way that she is at the present time.

CHAIR: Order! I uphold the point of order. The Minister will continue.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The services are now being packaged. The new service packages that are signed up are going to provide better services—integrated services, professional services—both from large and small organisations to better help people—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Thank you for that. Would you be able to put the rest of that answer on notice? I am asking a very specific question: How many of the eight young women who are currently in the Lillian Howell Project are under your parental responsibility? Maybe Ms Walk can answer that question.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I will ask the Secretary to comment but I caution you that you are identifying a particular number of young girls in a particular property, and I caution you against that. These young women are vulnerable; they are the women whom we are seeking to help—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: But you cannot tell me where they are going.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: If you persist with that question I will ask the Secretary to comment.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Why do you not have the answer? It is a pretty important question; it is a very specific question.

CHAIR: Order! The Minister has the right to answer the question how she wishes, including asking the Secretary to comment—which is what she has done.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Unfortunately, there are about 18,900 children and young people in care in New South Wales at the moment. We will take that question on notice and provide information as appropriate. Of course, there are some very real constraints on us about identifying children in care.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am not denying that.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Was the New South Wales Police Association or the NSW Police Force briefed about the changes or provided with any information about who to contact under the new system?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Under which new system?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: The Going Home Staying Home.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I will ask the Secretary to comment on that.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I will have to take that on notice. There was a 14-month consultation process. There were about 75 submissions to it; there was a lot of consultation with a lot of government and non-government organisations. The Link to Home referral channel that has been established was pretty carefully designed with the views of all those people on board, so I would be greatly surprised if the police were not consulted along the way. But I will take it on notice.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Are you concerned about the reduction of 24/7 services for women and children fleeing domestic violence and that they may end up in police stations until a refuge opens at 9.00 a.m.?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: There are specialist services for women with or without children, whether they are fleeing domestic violence or another circumstance. I will ask the Secretary to give you further details.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Will they be staffed overnight?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: You are asking specific questions about specific services and I will ask the Secretary to comment.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Will there be intakes during the night?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The short answer is yes. If there are any services about which you have a specific concern we would be happy to take that concern, but the service system is designed to improve on the one we have got and I will not diminish it. Domestic violence happens, sadly, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our intake, both the system intake and individual services intake, needs to be available to women when they need it.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: But you will come back to me with where those services will be available 24/7—in which regions?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes, if that is helpful.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: That is helpful. Are you aware that local police who have spent years building up relationships with the refuges say they have no idea where to take women now?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I find that unusual because the properties that are available to women for crisis accommodation and transitional accommodation have not changed; they have not diminished in number—in fact, they will increase in number. For example, 35 properties have been established inside a women's community housing entity established by the Government. So if there is any misapprehension by local police about the nature of their local service system and if you have got specific information about that we are happy to pursue that through our district leaders.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: We certainly have had concerns expressed to us by police about a lack of awareness about where to take women now who are victims of domestic violence—that is both in regional and in metropolitan areas, and I do not think the police would be misleading us.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: To the Secretary's point, there are 1,300 government properties, some of which provide housing and critical services for vulnerable women who are fleeing domestic violence—with or without children—and they remain in the system. The bricks and mortar are still there. We are happy to take your point on notice, but those services will continue. Those buildings will still be provided for those purposes.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Frankly, the staff are much more important than the bricks and mortar.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The point is that they are in the same location.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: They need to be staffed. Let us be honest about that.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: If they are government properties the services continue. I make that point again. The services continue and the 1,300 government properties remain open. They are in the same locations to provide services.

Ms JAN BARHAM: In the 2013-14 budget the percentage of young people receiving face-to-face assessments was expected to be 38, but was revised down to 36.9.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

Ms JAN BARHAM: If I am reading this correctly, the forecast for 2014-15 is 37.5. Can you outline why there is difficulty in meeting targets? What is being done to ensure that we have more face-to-face assessments in relation to risk of harm?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The Government has taken it upon itself to be transparent about the face-to-face science of children at risk of significant harm [ROSH]. That is important. We can only measure and improve on things we understand and are transparent to the public. The caseworker dashboard for the last couple of quarters has given a line of sight to the important work that we do in providing services to young vulnerable people. As to the specifics of your question, I will ask the Secretary to comment.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Picking up the Minister's point, we are publishing this material, which I think is an extremely healthy thing. What has happened is the number of children and young people who are reported at ROSH has continued to rise. We are getting to see more and more of those children and young people. So against the baseline of 2010-11, when we conducted 12,702 face-to-face assessments, in the most recent 12-month period reported on the dashboard we saw 18,388 children and young people, and conducted a face-to-face risk assessment, which is an increase of 5,686 children and young people.

Our caseworkers are seeing more children but the proportion that they are seeing is remaining static because the number of children reported at ROSH is rising. The other figure you used was a 35 per cent or 36 per cent. There are two elements here. There is the work we do as a statutory agency conducting face-to-face risk assessments and then there are other services that very vulnerable children would see from non-government agencies that are funded by us, which explains the difference between the two numbers. I will ask Ms Walk to add to that.

Ms WALK: I will go not so much to the reporting of young people, but services for young people, which I think was the other part of your question.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Yes, the face-to-face assessments.

Ms WALK: Over the past 12 months we have achieved about four different things around young people. The first thing was to establish and fully have 12 months out at the child protection adolescent referrals team. They are our child protection caseworkers who specialise in adolescents. This came out, as you might know, from the Wood special inquiry. I think all of us—we might have even commented this time last year—felt that we were unable to focus enough on young people. We get lots of referrals of zero to fives and then again of teenagers.

That is the second part that we have focussed on throughout New South Wales—focussing on young people. The second thing we have done is establish youth hope services, which I think we also spoke about last year and they were only just rolling out. Now all four of them are operational. They are quite innovative in how they are doing deep, in terms of time, and extensive work with adolescents who are at risk of significant harm, but who we would not normally, in terms of the child protection system, be working with. Those services are all operational.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Have you done an evaluation on those or is there any report?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We have just started them. We have an evaluation that we will do. Sometimes we start evaluations too early and you generally use your money evaluating the set-up of the service, not the outcomes and results of it. So that is what we are doing with them. The next thing is some work around therapeutic residential care. These are young people in out-of-home care who are living in residential care. We have been concerned that we need to use much more contemporary models for those children and young people,

so there is some work being done with Family and Community Services and the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies [ACWA] to get the best models and the best results.

We will be reporting back on that around March. The other thing is that not much has been said about Going Home Staying Home, but it is about under 16s. Earlier the Secretary mentioned our concerns about developing a service system for those young people. We do not think they should be in refuges in the first place; they should be in a more appropriate setting for children and very young people, and we are starting to do that work now.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Thank you for bringing that up and I look forward to seeing updates on that. The point about refuges for young people, I know I have written a question on notice about this. The property, other than government properties, whether they are private or local council—we know that local government is stretched financially. They often own properties that could be used, and some of them have been used previously, for this specific purpose and community collaborations to care for young people. I think they are being pressured by other financial constraints that in some ways the State is putting on them. Is that being looked at, because some of those are at the community level and have been ongoing and fall outside Going Home Staying Home? Have you been able to address those or are you looking into that?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Are they unsuccessful tenderers for the Going Home Staying Home reforms?

Ms JAN BARHAM: They are outside these programs because I think they have been operating. I have spoken to some of them and they did not even think they were able to apply for funding. My bias is rural and regional, but this is where communities do stuff. They are being pressured by other influences and the effects of other government programs, State and Federal, that are stretching communities, local government and non-government organisations. We are losing some of those so it is not just one bubble of what government does; it is about communities. How much have you been able to look at some of that? I know that on the North Coast some of them very much go towards young people.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I will make the general point that my concern was that we had what is called a service support fund under the Going Home Staying Home reforms. If there were unsuccessful providers that had new, additional and complementary services, they could apply for funding. That was a way to ensure that we had good projects that provided services to our community to continue and add to the Going Home Staying Home reforms. I will ask the Secretary or Ms Walk to comment further.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: One feature of Going Home Staying Home that is worth pointing out is that for the first time—the previous service system did see some non-government organisations bring their own resources to bear, including properties, but there was never any contractual commitment or any system-wide understanding of where those properties were and what was committed. These reforms will bring that. We are asking for and getting contractual commitments from our non-government partners, perhaps large charities, where they are committing resources, largely properties, into the service system beyond the services they are providing under contract. That will give us a clearer picture and lock in those services, at least for a three-year period. The broader question you are asking is how we ensure that the service systems we participate in or fund are better integrated with what is happening with other resources locally.

Ms JAN BARHAM: That is my point about no policy, no strategy. I am surprised that in my area people were unaware that you were doing this, not knowing that they could apply for money. This was my next question. If there is a solid policy or strategy that people know about, despite consultation, people can look at a document that states that this is the plan for New South Wales and say we fit in here. It takes all players. That is where I think the problem lies and I think that is what the Auditor-General was saying. You need a policy. Anyway, the other element is the petrol money.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Can I ask you—a policy for what?

Ms JAN BARHAM: A social housing policy that hopefully looks at the whole range of what it is all about; a continuum, how we go from woe to go. When people end up homeless, end up in crisis, there is not an overarching plan so people do not know where they fit in. There has not been that larger conversation in the community. Too many bits have been left out and because that conversation and communication has not happened I know why things are falling out. People say "I didn't know." They are so busy doing their services, they do not know unless it is there in big letters. That is another big conversation I thought the Auditor-General

had addressed. Can you advise about whether the additional 12 months Federal funding has come through? Is it clear yet where that money is going? Who can apply? What is the future of funding? You said that we have seen homelessness increase despite a lot of money going in. Do we have to wait until 2016 to find out that it is going to keep increasing before eventually sitting down to deliver a continued partnership, or is it going to get worse?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I will comment on what you said to the earlier question, because the Going Home Staying Home reform packages involve a stronger component of early intervention and arresting the risk of homelessness that are integrated in that fashion. So it is not only housing at the crisis end, but it is also about providing services that are not homes—they might be other broader social services for people so that they do not become homeless. It is an integrated approach. In regard to your specific question about the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, it of course had some very good innovations that formed the basis of some of the packages and services that are in our Going Home Staying Home package. We have accepted the Commonwealth Government's offer of a year extension. The details of those discussions are still being gone through. In other words, we do not have a finalised position for identification of those programs that will be funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Do you have an idea of the time frame?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I will ask the Secretary to comment.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: It has to be soon. We are now in August. These are government-to-government agreements, so they are agreements between New South Wales and the Commonwealth and have to be dealt with. There are other agencies that have to participate in it too.

Ms JAN BARHAM: I will move on to the income management trial in Bankstown. A previous Minister had a media report that it was going to be rolled out to other areas because of the success of the program. My understanding is there has not been a proper evaluation so its success is not a given. Can you provide an update of where the Government is up to? Has there been cost-benefit analysis about what happened with the trial and what might happen in any future programs? I think the previous Minister has said that she was seeking approval from the Federal Government to expand.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: It is an important program. We know that if there is the opportunity for rent to be paid through a system such as being trialled in Bankstown, it means that we can address some of the problems that you have identified and I am concerned about as a Minister trying to help arrest. We know that if people who are being encouraged to pay their rent before they have other expenditure, it means there is less of a risk of them falling into a situation where they are at risk of homelessness. That is a very good outcome. As you mentioned, that trial is a joint State and Commonwealth trial going since August 2012. The early indications are positive. I will ask the Secretary to comment further.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Just by way of backdrop, when someone arrives as a new tenant in social housing the default position is that their rent is automatically deducted, but people have a choice to reverse that. About 25 per cent of our tenants do, and from that 25 per cent there are a significant number who fall into sustained rental arrears. The consequence of that in our view is avoidable homelessness. We have about 1,000 people a year who either vacate their accommodation or, in a tiny number of cases, we are forced to evict because they lose control of their rental payments. Many of those people have responsibility for children, and we think it is a significant issue and one that is effectively addressed based on the results of this trial by an element of income management. We know that there is a range of views in the community about this, but we think that given the data, given the children who are affected by this, this is a policy worth proceeding with where it offers the prospect of stabilising accommodation, particularly for children.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Can I follow up?

CHAIR: I have not actually started the clock.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Just so that perhaps they might follow up when it comes back.

CHAIR: You can do that when it comes back for your time.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, what mechanisms have you put in place to ensure that women who are receiving services from faith-based organisations, particularly women who are victims of

domestic violence who are placed in refuges that are run by faith-based organisations, do not face any barriers to a full range of reproductive health services that they may need?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I think it is incredibly important that women have many options available to them, particularly when they are at their most vulnerable. There are both faith-based and secular organisations that will be providing the new services through the new contracts. They are precluded from providing a faith-based approach to the services to women who are vulnerable, and it is appropriate that that be the case. Women should be given a comprehensive range of services. Many of the faith-based organisations that are successful, that are heading up packages or that are partners in those service packages, have a long and proud history of very good service to the community and a dispassionate and agnostic approach to their services. I am confident that they will continue to provide services to the most vulnerable people, which is at the core of their missions, in the way that they have done that historically. I will ask the Secretary to comment further.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The contracts actually set out expectations of the professional approach that we require of our partners. This has not proven to be an issue in previous arrangements. From my discussions with people in large charities I am absolutely confident that they and their staff understand these concerns and will deal appropriately with the needs of women.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Do those contracts specifically address the issue of a full range of reproductive health services that women will need?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Those contracts address the professional expectations. If you go to our website you will see a range of guidelines that have been developed that describe the kinds of skills and behaviours that are expected of staff providing an organisation, providing either specialised services for women or a specialised response to women inside generalised services. It goes to questions of healthcare generally and reproductive rights.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I have been disappointed and concerned on behalf of those women who would perhaps believe that myth that has been upheld because it is my concern and the Government's concern to ensure that women get the services and the choices they need and deserve. As I said, I felt very strongly that those myths have perhaps scaremongered and have meant that some women who would otherwise seek those services, have not been able to seek them because they had been concerned. That is why it is so important that we now have what is called our myth-buster sheet and I hope you will help me to better get out that information there that these reforms are about providing the best possible services and choices to women who are vulnerable. That is the job of these reforms.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: So you will be monitoring these services to ensure that they are allowing women to retain their reproductive rights?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The Secretary is in charge of the implementation of these reforms. I will ask him to comment on that.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We have clear professional expectations set out in contracts and in the guidelines that are available to our service partners. I am entirely confident that they will deliver on that.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, looking at the budget papers for this year and last year's equivalent budget paper we note that the Statutory Child Protection service group was underspent by \$1.5 million. If you extrapolate backwards and aggregate the figure, that is a total underspend since 2011 of nearly \$20 million. The question is a very straightforward one: How can you underspend on child protection to almost \$20 million in regard to investigations when we have a situation of less than 12 per cent of a quarter of a million reports each year in this State?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Mr Donnelly, investigations in the sense of assessments, risk of serious harm [ROSH] reports—I just want to clarify the specific focus of your question.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: We are talking about the Statutory Child Protection service group underspend, which if you look at the last financial year, we have an underspend of \$1.5 million. In other words if you look at the budgeted figure for that—

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I understand the point you make about the budget but as to the specific focus of that question, you talked about investigations. I just want to be clear what you mean by investigations.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am talking about child protection investigations. We only have such a small number of those actually investigated in terms of numbers of reports so my question is—

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: So you are talking about the face-to-face assessments that are made of children reported at ROSH—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am talking about how can we find ourselves in this situation where in this State since 2011 the specific group that has this responsibility, the statutory child protection service group, has had underspends of nearly \$20 million? That is what I am trying to find out.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Well, you will note in this year's budget we have a just under 5 per cent increase to the budget.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am not interested in this year's; that is looking into the future.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: In fact, I will correct myself—it is just under a 2 per cent increase in the statutory child protection budget. To answer your question I will ask the Secretary to comment.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: With the greatest respect, can I say this is a matter I am directing to you, the Minister. You are the one who signs off on the budget.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order: The Minister is entitled to answer the question as she sees fit and that includes referring it to other witnesses who are at the table. It is inappropriate to suggest that anything other than the normal practice is being adopted in that regard.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: This is a line item in the budget.

CHAIR: Order! I uphold the point of order. The Minister is entitled to ask others at the table to comment.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Mr Donnelly, you are correct. The budget is an estimate of what will be spent during the course of the year. We estimated we would spend \$1.5 million more in 2013-14 than we did. The \$1.5 million represents about a quarter of 1 per cent. Money is an absolutely essential input into the service but the service, as you point out, is largely measured by both the number of face-to-face risk assessments done and then the quality of that work, which I would argue is best measured by the proportion of those children who over time are re-reported to us. The output, the number of children seen in the 12-month period that track 2013-14, actually increased fairly significantly during the course of the year so while we underspent by about a quarter of 1 per cent we did see considerably more children than young people with face-to-face risk assessment.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you for that partial answer but it does not answer the part of the question that goes to why since 2011, if you actually aggregate the underspend in this area, we have almost a \$20 million underspend.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I would need to take on notice what happened in previous budgets, I am sorry. I am familiar with 2013-14 but I am not familiar with previous years.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Do you have anything to add, Minister?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: To say that out of the budget there is a \$500 million commitment to Safe Home for Life, which is about the better protection, about vulnerable children, part of which is the statutory protection system. There are the set of reforms that were introduced through the Houses of Parliament earlier this year which give a greater chance of permanency for a safe home to our children. They have principles of restoration, guardianship and importance placed on open adoption, and an important investment into building parent capacity.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am talking about the underspend, Minister. My question is about the underspend. It has been nothing else.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order: The Minister is being generally relevant and the Minister should be entitled to answer the question.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I will move on. It was dealing specifically with the underspend. If the Minister has no further comment, I will move on to my next question.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: The Minister is still entitled to answer the question and she is answering the question.

CHAIR: Order! You did ask the Minister if she would like to comment.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In regard to the underspend.

CHAIR: Order! She is being generally relevant. Has the Minister concluded her answer or is there anything else she would like to add?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I would like to move on to my next question. Minister, I notice that the target for reducing the number of children at risk of significant harm by 1.5 per cent a year has been abandoned. Why is that the case?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The commitment to helping our kids as early as we possibly can through caseworker assistance on the ground is a very strong commitment of this Government. As I was going on to say in my previous answer, there is a half a billion dollar commitment to child services and some of those measures are increasing the intensity of the work which our caseworkers do in the field. They are doing the heavy work of working with vulnerable families and vulnerable kids to ensure that those kids have the best possible opportunity for a safe home for life. The commitment of the Government to our caseworkers, who make those face-to-face assessments possible, is a very strong one in this budget. We have also responded to their particular—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister—

CHAIR: Order! Mr Donnelly, just let the Minister finish her answer. She is being generally relevant.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Point of order: I asked a very specific question about the abandonment of the 1.5 per cent figure. That was the question. That was the range of my question. Either we get an explanation for that or we do not. If there is no explanation, that is fine. I will move on to my next question.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: To the point of order: The Minister is being generally relevant and should be entitled and indeed should answer the question that she was given, and she is doing it. She should not be interrupted by this member or any other.

CHAIR: Order! Yes, the Minister is being generally relevant.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: If she hasn't got a clue, she should say, "I haven't got a clue" and we will move on.

CHAIR: Order! Mr Donnelly, let the Minister finish her answer.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Mr Donnelly, when I get out to the field and I talk to caseworkers, which I have taken a very strong interest in doing to understand as best I can as the Minister the important work they do, the budget announcement in June supports the kind of supports they think they need to do a better job of doing face-to-face assessments and the important work they do with children who are at risk.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I would like to move on with my next question.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: There is a \$23 million commitment to giving them assistant caseworkers—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I would like to move on to my next question because I am not getting an answer on the target.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order—

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am not getting an answer on the target so I would like to move on to my next question.

CHAIR: Order! Mr Donnelly, would you like to take a point of order?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I would like to move on to my next question.

CHAIR: Order! The Minister is still finishing. I am sure she is coming to a conclusion then you will be able to move on to your next question.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: She is not addressing the question.

CHAIR: Order! She is still being generally relevant.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: No, she is not, with greatest respect, Madam Chair.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order: The Hon. Greg Donnelly is now cavilling consistently with your rulings. He is obviously getting a little bit excitable.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: No, I am not. I have just got limited time.

CHAIR: Order! I understand that. I am sure the Minister will be concluding her answer and will allow you to move on to another question.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Thank you, Chair. The final point I would make is there is a \$23 million commitment to providing 73 assistant caseworkers into the child protection system and the focus of that is in response to the desires of caseworkers, who need assistance so that they can get on with the targeted work of working with our vulnerable children.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You have dropped the target and there is no explanation. Let's move on. Minister, do you relieve caseworkers on leave?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I will ask the Secretary to respond to that.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Stone the crows, Minister, it is a straightforward question.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Surely the Minister knows whether caseworkers are relieved.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: It is extraordinary that the Minister cannot answer that.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I think it is becoming two points of order. First, the Minister is entitled to answer the question; she is doing something entirely appropriate. The second point of order relates to disorderly conduct. It is plain that Mr Donnelly is simply doing a stunt.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: The Minister should know when caseworkers are relieved.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I know how it is done.

CHAIR: Order! Members will come to order. The Minister is entitled to answer the question as she sees fit. If she would like the Secretary to respond, she is perfectly entitled to do that.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I will ask the Secretary to comment, he runs the Department of Family and Community Services.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You are the Minister, for heaven's sake.

CHAIR: Order! That is the Minister's answer. The member will allow the Secretary to answer the question.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The short answer is, yes, after a period. I was wracking my brains to remember what that period is. I used to know. If someone is out for a week of leave we do not backfill them, if they are out for a longer period we do. The approach we have taken to that has not changed for a number of years.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Can I clarify that you do that in every case? Can you provide to the Committee what the arrangements are, such as more than a week then you do, but can you confirm that on notice?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

CHAIR: Order! Before I give the call to the Hon. Jan Barham there are a couple of occasions during the hearing when there has been noise from the public gallery. As members in the public gallery would know, it is a public hearing but it is not open for comment and it does interfere with *Hansard* and Committee proceedings. I would ask those in the public gallery to be aware of that.

Ms JAN BARHAM: I will move on to ask about community housing transfers. How many additional community housing dwellings were delivered in 2013-14 as a result of the transfer of public housing properties to community housing providers?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Community housing is a really important part of the social housing system. Community housing providers provide great assistance. They have had properties transferred to them. They often manage tenancies and that is part of the broader role they play in providing housing to vulnerable people. You have a specific question about the number and I will ask the Secretary to answer the question.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: From memory it is 1,800 during the course of 2013-14. As at June 2014 title to 5,818 properties has been transferred to 16 registered community housing providers. Those properties were all funded under the Commonwealth's Economic Stimulus Plan (Nation Building). I am happy to confirm on notice the number of titles that were transferred in the 2013-14 financial year.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Are you able to advise on future transfers? There is now a lower House inquiry looking at tenancy management. Is this a process of moving towards a wholesale release of Government public housing to the community housing sector? What I think people are interested to know, and have the right to know, is the contractual arrangement for leveraging capacity and the provision of support services. Are you able to give any information or will you take that on notice?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: There was a gentlemen's agreement between jurisdictions around the time of the nation building stimulus. There was invitation from the Commonwealth that States and Territories had the opportunity to transfer up to 35 per cent of their public housing stock into the community housing sector. New South Wales has transferred some, but not all, of that proportion and there has been considerable work done in the recent period to develop options for consideration by Government around the balance of that. That is work in progress.

The properties that were transferred under the nation building stimulus recently did have initially a "best endeavours". Community housing providers would offer their best endeavours to borrow against the income stream and the assets to build more, and they were progressively converted into tighter contractual

commitments between community housing providers and the Government. I need to take on notice whether there remain any of those still to be concluded, but from memory most, if not all, have now been done.

Ms JAN BARHAM: This was raised in the housing inquiry: Is it possible that one of those contracts could be made available so we can see how you are doing it?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: To examine the components?

Ms JAN BARHAM: Good contract writing is what is going to deliver the outcome.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I see no reason why we would not make that available. The terms of the contract and the allocation of responsibility we could certainly make available.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Some of these issues I raise because it is often a shock to realise that some of the basic information about how Government does its contracts with vendors is not made publicly available. Local government is required to make this information available. It seems quite strange that at this level of Government it is a media release or a commitment is given without that disclosure.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: There is also a Public Accounts Committee inquiry into tenancy management at the moment. I welcome that. I will be interested to see what that committee reports on. One of the aspects of that is the effectiveness of the tenancy in public housing versus private and community housing, again with the focus on the clients. I believe they are due to report. They convened and announced the terms of reference on 9 July. So this year they will report on that.

Ms JAN BARHAM: We saw some good examples of those wraparound services being provided through the community housing models during the inquiry. The Federal budget and the impacts on payments for unemployed people, disability payments, all of those, has there been any discussion or interaction with the Federal Government about how those changes might impact on the delivery of services and the pressures on the State Government?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The Government has made very early and strong advocacy to the Commonwealth Government having them understand our position as a service provider and how those budgets and announcements might have an impact on our provision of the services at the grassroots level. I am pleased to note that there are a number of references and inquiries and white papers that are going to be coming out for an opportunity to have our views made clearer. We have the interim report of the reference group, the McClure review, the White Paper on the Reform of the Federation, which will include a focus on housing and homelessness. There are many opportunities where we will make the points strongly that a change in Commonwealth budgetary allocation has a direct impact on those people at a State level we want to provide the best services for.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Will you have some mechanism in place to measure any impact that flows from the Commonwealth changes?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I will ask the Secretary to comment.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Through a group internal to the agency, the Family and Children's Services Agency [FACSA], which is a research and evaluation team, we are looking to make sure we have good baseline information against which any change in demand for our services can be measured. There is a process initiated by the Commonwealth to examine roles and responsibilities in the Federation. It is important to us that we equip the New South Wales Government with good evidence about what the impact of some Commonwealth decision making is or could be on demand for our services.

Ms JAN BARHAM: I have a question about the NSW Spectacles Program. It is really important for so many people.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It certainly is.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Yes, look around the room.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It certainly is.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Yes. There have been problems with that program because the expenditure has remained at \$5 million, which is the same level it has been for the past two years. I understand that the spectacles were rationed and that people were waiting six to eight weeks. Can you provide an update on that program? Will there be any relief for people who are struggling to get spectacles?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: It is an important program that assists vulnerable people by providing them with vision aids and spectacles. A review was conducted and we now have a new provider. The review resulted in recommendations about how the funding could achieve better results for vulnerable people with vision problems. The Secretary was involved in that review and I invite him to comment.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: In turn, I invite Ms Walk to respond.

Ms WALK: As the Minister said, we have undertaken a review because the program had not been examined for some time and the landscape around the provision of spectacles had also changed dramatically. In May 2014, Vision Care Optical Services was advised after some years of renegotiation that its contract would conclude. We began with Vision Australia on 1 July 2014. We are confident that the online/IT solution provided to support application and assessment processes will make this a much more effective and efficient program. In fact, we believe that 13,000 more spectacles and visual aids will be delivered within the program budget.

Ms JAN BARHAM: You have identified efficiencies so that the funding can deliver more without any increase?

Ms WALK: Absolutely. The volume and geographic reach will improve.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Last year it was indicated that an evaluation of Common Ground had commenced. What is happening with that? Are there any plans to roll out more of that style of successful housing model for people in need? Has the evaluation been done or is it available?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I will take that question on notice. I will let you know when the evaluation will be ready. It is our practice to proactively publish any evaluation of publicly funded services.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Hopefully it will inform the policy that will be developed to make more money available for a good program.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

Ms JAN BARHAM: During the housing inquiry we visited the Apollo public housing estate at Dubbo. We were told that it was a successful program. A public housing estate had been sold off for private housing, but no-one could explain where those hundreds of predominantly Aboriginal people had been relocated. There seemed to be no tracking or that information was not available to the committee. We were told that the project was a success and it appeared that the department had become a very successful real estate agent. However, it could not provide details about where those displaced people had gone.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: A ministerial action group was established in response to some very disturbing antisocial behaviour.

Ms JAN BARHAM: By the previous Government.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The issues were with the Dubbo estate. That group has recently morphed into a senior steering committee chaired by the local member that is now examining issues across Dubbo. The Secretary will provide the specific details.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I am sorry, but I cannot add much. Are you specifically asking whether we tracked the people who were moved out of that estate as part of the deconcentration of disadvantaged people in the community?

Ms JAN BARHAM: Yes. The information I was given about the evaluation of the success of that project was appalling. It was full of glib comments about this great project and how everybody was happier.

However, there was no hard evidence or information about relocation. I was very disappointed in the quality of that evaluation. This is a big issue and it highlights the need for an estate strategy. If we relocate and impact people's health and wellbeing we must know where they are going and how they are faring because there are issues that the Government does not have the capacity to deal with. I will follow up with more questions on that project. I found that particular example alarming. The 2014-15 budget refers to the decline in social housing stock with the number of households assisted unchanged at 140,000. Is the Government committed to increasing the net supply of social housing stock?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The 2014-15 budget for the NSW Land and Housing Corporation has been increased by 23 per cent. For the first time there is an increase in the capital works budget to improve our public housing assets. In addition, \$284 million has been allocated for maintenance and \$121 million has been allocated for new homes, which means we can assist more people. Obviously there is a lead time for new homes. We are trying to put the social and public housing system on a more sustainable footing. It was running at a structural deficit for many years because the previous Government did not address it in any significant or material way. I am pleased to say that this year the Government has made a commitment to a net number of new properties in the system. It is the first time that has happened in quite some time.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, your predecessor committed to filling all of the caseworker vacancies in the Hunter, but I understand that there are still 32 vacancies. Why are those vacancies still not filled?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The Government committed to being very transparent about caseworker vacancies. Dashboards identifying vacancies are published on the departmental website for everyone to see. That is very important because, as I have said, we cannot improve unless we measure what we are doing. The department continues to fill those caseworker positions. I invite the Secretary to provide more detail.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I want to know whether as the new Minister you are committed to your predecessor's commitment to fill all the vacancies in the Hunter and what is the time frame.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: As I said, the department continues to fill caseworker positions.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am asking about the Government's public commitment, which has been made on several occasions, to fill all the vacancies in the Hunter. There are still 32 vacancies.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The department continues to fill those casework positions. I have answered the question. I invite the Secretary to comment.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The Government has made its expectations of us very clear. It is a key measure of my performance and of many of my senior colleagues that we reduce the vacancy rate, both on a statewide basis and in regional areas. The Hunter is our largest district and there is a very great difference between the lower Hunter and New England. It is in the New England area that we have for a long time had a challenge in recruiting and retaining caseworkers. We are beginning to make good progress statewide, but there are areas in New South Wales in which we are now moving into very localised recruitment strategies.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, what is the saving for the running average of 187 caseworker vacancies? What is the annual saving accruing to the department?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I will ask the Secretary to respond.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We are not trying to make savings by running caseworker vacancies.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I did not say that.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We are working extraordinarily hard to try to reduce the vacancy rate.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Do you want to take that question on notice?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: You are saying: What are the salary and on-costs of 187 caseworkers?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: The question stands as it is. As I understand, we have a rolling average of 187 caseworker vacancies. I am establishing the value of that.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We are happy to provide on notice the salary and on-costs of 187 caseworkers.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I return to my earlier question about the relief of caseworkers. I understand that the answer given was that they are relieved.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Is that the case?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: They are relieved after a period of time. I would need to check and come back to you on notice what that period of time is.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: How does that square with the Ernst and Young report that you are well familiar with and which we have discussed in previous hearings? The report said that they are not replaced.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: It is a big report and it has been a long time since I had to read it closely. I am more than happy to respond if you table the part of the report that relates to your question.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I say it is in the report. I would be grateful if you would explain why there seems to be a variance between what you have said and what is in that report.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We will do our best.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The budget is supporting caseworkers in the field. The new caseworker assistant positions that are being funded in the budget will allow most caseworkers in the field to better focus on the work that they do, the big difference they make to our vulnerable kids. They will be able to spend more time with families and kids.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, we have vacancies.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Their roles are important. We have also made a commitment and are upgrading front-line information technology.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: The roles of the vacancies?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: This will enable our caseworkers to focus on families and kids rather than spending more time than they should on administrative, office and reporting tasks.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, are you familiar with the fact that in some New South Wales suburbs and communities there are safe car parks being established?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Please clarify: safe car parks in relation to what risks?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: They are called safe car parks. They are being established in some communities and suburbs in New South Wales. Are you familiar with the term?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Safe for whom?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: They are called safe car parks. Are you familiar with the terminology used in the community welfare area?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Secretary, would you like to comment?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That would be no, I do not know.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I must confess I am not familiar with the terminology.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Do I take it that both the Minister and the Secretary do not know what a safe car park is?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I am not familiar with the term.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I can inform you that the safe car parks that are being established with lighting on and access to amenities like toilets and showers are for women and children sleeping in cars. Are you familiar with the fact that safe car parks are being established in communities and suburbs in New South Wales?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: No.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Are you surprised that we have the situation whereby we have community groups, church groups and local organisations seeing fit to open their car parks, put the lights on all night and provide opportunities for women and children sleeping in their cars to use toilets and showers associated with those churches, community groups or other organisations?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I make the point that the reforms that this Government introduced—the Going Home Staying Home reforms—are about putting more money to provide services to the people who are vulnerable, to the people who are at risk of homelessness. We are providing more money, better services, more targeted services, early intervention services. That is the strength of these reforms.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Are you prepared to accept that the department will map the establishment of safe car parks that are being established across the State so we can see how many of these safe car parks are being established?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I would hope that in delivering the Going Home Staying Home homelessness reforms and in delivering a 250 per cent increase in four-year budget for Start Safely, a rapid rehousing product particularly for vulnerable women and children, we will relieve the need for any community to have to establish a so-called safe car park.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I take it that today is the first time you have heard that these are being established in suburbs and communities around the State. I am inviting you to take an interest in mapping them so you can see how many are being established. You are not prepared to show any interest in that?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: No, you misread my response. We are concerned to work at a very local level with community partners to provide the best collection of responses to people in need. I would simply point out that we are trying to deliver an expansion to the specialist homeless system that it is targeted precisely at the set of risks you are talking about.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I make the point that this Government has had the courage to reform the specialist homelessness system to, on the basis of evidence, provide more services in more parts of New South Wales where the needs are. These are integrated, wraparound services to address some of the difficult circumstances that you are identifying which might give rise to those needs. I am strongly behind those reforms. This system had to be reformed. The former Labor Government did not reform the system in the face of evidence that it needed to be reformed for vulnerable people in our community.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, this is your political speech. At the end of the day we have a situation where women and children are sleeping in motor vehicles around this State. It has got to the stage whereby community groups, completely unbeknownst to the department and yourself, are setting up safe car parks for these people to sleep in a safe precinct. You know nothing about it. I find that quite extraordinary.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I would not assume that because I do not know about it my colleagues, particularly my district leaders and their teams, do not know about it.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Is anyone at the table familiar with the term "safe car park"?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Can I just go back—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Let the record show that none of the officers at the table, including the Minister, knows what a safe car park is.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: If you would like to tender the document that would scope this, we would be very happy to look at it.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Scope it?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: We have made a major commitment—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: It is an absolute disgrace.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order: Apart from the Hon. Greg Donnelly needing a Bex and a lie down, the Minister is entitled to answer the question without an outraged response. The Minister should be shown that courtesy, as I showed all members in the former Labor Government.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Let the record show the Minister had invited a member of the Opposition to scope out the position with respect to safe car parks in New South Wales.

CHAIR: Order! The Minister is entitled to answer the question as she sees fit.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: My invitation was for you to share that information with us. I make the point again that we have reformed specialist homelessness services. We have had the courage to reform the system to make it better for vulnerable people.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, I have one staff member. You have your ministerial staff and department staff. It is not up to me—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order—

CHAIR: Order! The Hon. Trevor Khan has taken a point of order.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: The Minister is entitled to answer the question without interruption.

CHAIR: Order! I uphold the point of order.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Women in that circumstance would immediately become priorities for temporary housing, for prioritised social housing. If the member has any information he wants to share with us, we would be happy to take it.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I invite the Minister and the Secretary to turn their eyes to the New South Wales Central Coast.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, how much did the Government spend last year, 2013-14, on motel accommodation for people who are homeless?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The department provides a range of services to people with different housing needs. Part of that is temporary accommodation. For specifics of the dollars provided through that I will ask the Secretary to comment.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The temporary accommodation expenditure last year was about \$11½ million. We have budgeted slightly more than that amount this year.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Was all of that on motels or other forms?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: No, it would be a range of short-term housing.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Are you able to provide the amount that was spent on motel accommodation?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I am not sure, but if we can break it down by accommodation type we will provide it to you.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You said that there is slightly more budgeted for this year. Are you expecting the same proportion to be spent again on motel accommodation?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: As I say, I do not know about the composition of the expenditure across temporary accommodation types. I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Could you tell the Committee what the average length of time is that people spend in a motel before they are able to access long-term housing?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Again, I am not sure whether we hold data in that form, but if we do we will provide it to you.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: If I could make an additional comment on that? One of the major parts and focuses of the Going Home Staying Home reforms is to ensure that we can help people before they become homeless, before they seek that temporary accommodation. The integrated services that have been provided through the service packages have a breadth of services to them so that we can help people before they become homeless, before they are coming to Housing NSW and saying, "I need temporary accommodation for tonight", because that is a better outcome for them, it is a better outcome for our community, who cares about helping these people, as do I

CHAIR: Ms Barham?

Ms JAN BARHAM: If I can follow up on Mr Donnelly's question, I am aware of places that are allowing people to park in car parks on the North Coast. During Homeless Persons Week, Homelessness NSW put a call out with three priority issues they thought needed to be addressed. One of them was about investment in street counts, and I think this is what this issue goes to. Is there a commitment to ensure that we better understand the numbers of people who are homeless and the various types of homelessness? In coastal areas we know there is lots of overcrowding.

I have heard a story about young people who live in a share house and work in the hospitality industry. Whoever gets enough work that week gets to have a bedroom; the others sleep on the floor or on a couch. These are unusual ways for people to be living and I think there needs to be some research and understanding of it, and Homelessness NSW put that forward. Did you respond to that request for better capturing of the data?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Another important aspect of the Going Home Staying Home reforms is that there are requirements for people assistance; so, in other words, a measurement of those services that are provided against criteria. What we will be moving to, which is important, is a way of measuring the effectiveness of those services when they are provided. So these new reforms also provide that dimension. As I have said before in this Committee, spending money is important but we need to measure the impact of that money, and these reforms are being rolled out and measured in such a way that we will have a better sense of what is effective and how our service providers are tracking against what the public money that has been given to them for good effect is being used on.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I do not know whether we have provided a specific response to that request from Homelessness NSW. The Going Home Staying Home reforms that embed a common assessment tool across the whole of the system will mean that there is better quality and more consistent data about demand. But I am happy to take the question on notice and respond more completely.

Ms JAN BARHAM: I go to the area of Aboriginal housing. How many dwellings were delivered in the last financial year and how many are envisaged for the future. I think Ms Young knows that I am particularly interested in whether we are going to see any innovation in the design or the implementation and better spend rather than what I hear, and you might confirm, that a lot of the expense happens because materials and workers are sent from the city often to remote areas to deliver this housing rather than localised or taking advantage of training and local investment.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Before I ask Ms Young to comment on the specifics I want to say that we know, of course, that Aboriginal people are overrepresented in accessing FACS services, and it is of concern.

We do need to provide general services, of course, but there needs to be a small amount of specialist services that specifically assist Aboriginal people. We launched just recently a FACS-wide strategy about getting better outcomes for Aboriginal people in the community; in other words, stretching across the social services and housing parts of this portfolio. Specifically to your questions about housing, I will ask Ms Young to comment.

Ms YOUNG: I might just add, following on from your last question about homelessness and overcrowding: the Aboriginal Housing Office is doing some research at the moment in remote communities, talking to tenants and talking to communities around the actual numbers. As you know, Aboriginal communities are complex and it is not necessarily recorded particularly well, especially where there are large family groups living in houses. We are undertaking that research and we hope that that is finished towards the end of this year. That should give us a better sense of putting some real data around what the issues are in a community.

To answer your question in terms of new houses last year, through the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing [NPARIH] agreement we delivered 79 new properties; we also delivered 21 employment-related accommodation properties, and that is a really important thing for us: That is about us providing properties in regional and areas where there are educational opportunities. For example, through that, we provided properties in Tamworth and Goulburn for the Indigenous Police Recruiting Our Way Delivery [IPROWD] program that the police do, so that the students of those programs can get some educational opportunities. They are fantastic outcomes for our tenants and particularly target those who live in remote areas by giving them the opportunity to come to the regional centres to be able to get education and training opportunities. In addition to that, we delivered 25 of our own new supply. That was for last year's count.

Ms JAN BARHAM: What was the budget for the 25—the actual?

Ms YOUNG: The budget was around \$13 million, roughly. The way that we select where they go is obviously for a resource allocation and we also look at where the biggest need is and how that fits with the waiting list and the various components of that. We are delivering more houses and, again, this year in the budget there is a significant increase in the NPARIH funding for us to deliver more houses. We are expected to deliver 80 houses through that and we are also expected to deliver 25 more employment-related accommodation new houses. Again, our target will be between 25 and 30 for our new supply, depending on the location, the market prices and the construction costs.

Ms JAN BARHAM: We have still got a relatively high unit cost for the delivery. I am trying to understand why the cost of some of these houses is so high. I previously understood it was because everything was coming from Sydney out to the regions, which does not seem to me to be a very holistic approach, particularly when we know in other States there are programs that look at value-adding with training and Aboriginal workforce programs rather than city people going out to the country to deliver expensive homes.

Ms YOUNG: We deliver our services through the Land and Housing Corporation in an agreement with them, which are delivered through their contracting. However, we work with them around an Aboriginal employment agreement. There is a 20 per cent Aboriginal employment target within that. We exceed that and our average is 27 per cent. The primary work is done by Aboriginal builders where that is the case. The unit cost can be particularly high in remote areas with the cost of getting the materials out there. We are always looking at new ways of delivering options and we certainly work very closely with the Land and Housing Corporation about some of those options.

For example, we have recently been delivering some units that have been built by Corrective Services Industries. That has been working with Corrective Services to give inmates training opportunities. We are delivering some in Coonamble at the moment, we have delivered a couple in Walgett and there are some that are going to be delivered in Baradine in the next few months. That is a really exciting opportunity for us in terms of giving some people some skills. The problem with that is sometimes that costs a little bit more because of the nature of what we are trying to do.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Is this information on the website, or is there a reporting process around this to show more of a whole-of-government approach? Is it unreasonable to expect that there would be?

Ms YOUNG: As I understand it, the detail of the information would not be but we are certainly happy to provide more information.

Ms JAN BARHAM: I do not see any reporting on it.

Ms YOUNG: We have reporting on our unit costs within our annual report, which is publicly available, but the detail around the programs is probably not there. We are happy to provide that.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Thank you, that would be appreciated. I turn now—I cannot find the page—to the forced adoption practices and delivery of the three-year program. How is that going and where is it up to? I think we are entering the final year. Again, it is a complication with all government department websites being different. It would be easier if they all had a uniform "where to find" thing. On some websites it is very difficult to find information or it is a bit of a matrix. I would like to see the Post Adoption Resource Centre [PARC] information and reporting because concerns were raised about whether it would be able to do outreach work. I am interested to know how many people were supported and how many regional people, if that is available.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I will ask Ms Walk to respond to your question, but obviously an important part of what these Houses of Parliament did was make an apology to the parents and children who were affected by past forced adoption policies. I was proud to do that as a member of Parliament and as a Minister at that time. Obviously it reflected a great concern across the community. Pleasingly, we are ahead of the Commonwealth Government and have been able to do that. We are taking some practical measures and I will ask Ms Walk to address them.

Ms WALK: I have in front of me the projections for 2014-15 but not necessarily how they went in 2013-14. Because of previous experience, I know that the Post Adoption Resource Centre has a detailed way of reporting on a quarterly basis, and I am quite certain it would be happy to pass those details to you. Let me read out what it is intending to do—this would have been based on its projections from the previous year so it may give an indication of its extra commitments. Telephone and email support sessions, 3,209. The centre does a lot of email counselling. That may well be people who live outside New South Wales but the adoption took place in New South Wales for the birth parent or the young person themselves. It did face-to-face counselling of 5,082 clients. That would be people who attended their Hurstville office. It provided intermediary services—where they act as an intermediary—for 84 clients.

There were 11 information meetings and workshops across New South Wales, and they would be largely in regional areas; one or two of them would be in the metropolitan area. We can get a breakdown for you about where they took place. When they do their workshops and meetings they tend to have one with professionals in the area—for example, GPs—and one with the local people as well as one with what they call the Friends of PARC who have experienced adoption themselves and need to give information to other people. One meeting may well have an impact with a range of participants.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Is there any indication of what will happen beyond 2014-15?

Ms WALK: No. Let us clarify it. I think it is 2015-16 because it was three years and we just started last year. This was the extra finance in terms of them having extra demands. Obviously the Post Adoption Resource Centre—

Ms JAN BARHAM: Is that the \$900,000 that has been supplemented by additional?

Ms WALK: The \$900,000 was additional. Generally they have funding of about \$300,000 per annum.

Ms JAN BARHAM: But that is only for three years?

Ms WALK: That is correct but my understanding it that it has another year to run. We were always clear: We wanted to see the impact on the needs of their services. We will be working with them around that to ensure that they make the best use of the resources they have.

CHAIR: That concludes today's hearing.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.