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GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 3

Tuesday 15 September 2009

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

**CORRECTIVE SERVICES, PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM,
SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE**

The Committee met at 4.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. A. R. Fazio (Chair)

The Hon. J. G. Ajaka
The Hon. G. J. Donnelly
Ms S. P. Hale

The Hon. M. R. Mason-Cox
The Hon. R. A. Smith
The Hon. H. M. Westwood

PRESENT

The Hon. J. C. Robertson, *Minister for Corrective Services, Minister for Public Sector Reform, and Special Minister of State*

Corrective Services New South Wales

Mr R. Woodham, *Commissioner*

Mr G. Schipp, *Deputy Commissioner*

Mr L. Grant, *Assistant Commissioner*

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Ms F. McPherson, *Deputy Director General*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

CHAIR: I declare the hearing into the budget estimates 2009-10 open. I welcome Minister Robertson and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Corrective Services, Public Sector Reform and Special Minister of State. We will be dealing with those altogether; there will be no break-up. Before we commence I will make some comments about procedural matters.

In accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, only Committee members and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photos. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, you must take responsibility for what you publish or what interpretation you place on anything that is said before the Committee. Guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available on the table by the door. Any messages from attendees in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber and support staff or the Committee clerks. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers while at the table. I remind everyone that mobile phones should be turned off.

Twenty-one days has been allocated for the return of questions taken on notice, and that is from when the Committee secretariat gets them to you. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning. All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. I remind you, Minister, that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament.

RON WOODHAM, Commissioner, Corrective Services of New South Wales,

GERRY SCHIPP, Deputy Commissioner, Corrective Services of New South Wales, and

FRAN McPHERSON, Deputy Director General, Department of Premier and Cabinet, sworn and examined:

LUKE GRANT, Assistant Commissioner, Corrective Services New South Wales, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Corrective Services, Public Sector Reform and the Special Minister of State open for examination. As there is no provision for a Minister to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questioning, we will begin with questions from the crossbench. The time will be allocated equally in 20-minute brackets, starting with crossbench members, then the Opposition and then Government members.

The Hon. ROY SMITH: The Government decided to defer the privatisation of the prisoner transport section and Cessnock pending it achieving some savings goals. Can you tell me how we are going in that regard?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Just to be clear, on Cessnock the Government has made a decision not to proceed. That decision was taken on the basis of the global financial crisis and the fact that there were significant job losses in the Cessnock area with the closure of Pacific Brands. The likelihood was that officers who were relocating from Cessnock to elsewhere within the State and selling their houses would be impacted upon financially if their houses were on the market at the same time as that closure. So, the Government has taken the decision that we will not proceed at any point with Cessnock.

The prisoner escort and court security matter is now before the Industrial Relations Commission of New South Wales, where the president of the commission has designated the vice-president, Michael Walton, to facilitate discussions between Corrective Services and the Prison Officers Vocational Branch of the Public Service Association. Those negotiations are ongoing, and I am advised they are making progress towards achieving the savings the Government expects in that area of \$5 million. That matter was given six months to reach a satisfactory conclusion. The Government is committed to making those savings of \$5 million. We have also indicated to all parties that we expect if those savings are not achieved that we will continue to look at outsourcing, but in the interim those matters are before the Industrial Relations Commission and my advice is they are going well and we are likely to achieve those savings through the negotiation process.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: My question is about inmate numbers. How many times in the past year has a person been detained on remanded because he or she has not been able to meet a condition of bail that

appropriate accommodation be available for that person? How many people have been unable to meet that condition?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Just so I am clear, you are saying they have been offered bail and have not been able to make bail?

Ms SYLVIA HALE: That one of the conditions of bail has been that they have to have accommodation that meets the requirements of Corrective Services but because they have not been able meet that requirement they have had to remain in prison.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: So, accommodation that has been approved by Corrective Services as suitable for the purposes of bail?

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I might refer that to Mr Woodham.

Mr WOODHAM: Are you sure you are talking about Corrective Services or the courts?

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I assume the courts require certain conditions and one of those conditions may be that the person is able to live in accommodation that is suitable or meets the needs of Corrective Services.

Mr WOODHAM: I might refer that on to Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: We do not routinely collect that information. However, we have collected it in the past, and it has a reasonably small number but a significant number. I am pleased to be able to tell you that this year funding has been made available by the Federal Government to put in place a project specifically to support people who are granted bail and who are unable to meet their bail conditions because of housing and accommodation. So, we have funding from the Federal Government for two additional positions starting in the metropolitan area. One will focus on women, and one will focus on men in our major reception centres to provide people with assistance and better linkages to bail accommodation to prevent homelessness specifically.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: You said you collected such information in the past but you do not do so at present. Why did you stop collecting that information?

Mr GRANT: The reason is it is not immediately available in the records we get from the courts. The only way we have been able to do it in the past is to have someone sitting in the courts and recording the details of the basis for the bail decision. The second thing is once they have been granted bail and they come into custody we do not have a system of collecting that specific bit of information.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Can I ask how much it costs the Government to keep a person on remand in jail each day compared to, say, if they were to live outside the jail while on bail?

Mr GRANT: I ask Mr Schipp to comment on the costs.

Mr SCHIPP: The cost per day in a remand facility is around \$180 per inmate per day.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: So, presumably that adds up over time and it could present a significant cost to Corrective Services keeping in jail that person who would not otherwise be there? Is it not in the department's interest to collect the data just to see what the cost impost is on the department?

Mr SCHIPP: As Mr Grant said, the data is not available to us as a department.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: But what I am saying is that if, in the past, you thought it was sufficiently important to obtain that data, why is it still not important to consider the cost?

Mr GRANT: Basically, we would not generally accept that that is a good enough reason for someone to be on remand, the fact of homelessness, in that we believe that it is their responsibility already to provide assistance to people in an effort to get accommodation if that is one of the conditions of their bail. It is actually something that is not an absolute thing. If someone comes into custody and they have been granted bail and a

condition of their bail relates to a housing arrangement they cannot meet, we will attempt to get housing made available for them.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: In total numbers and as a proportion of the inmate population, has the number of inmates from an indigenous background increased or decreased over the last five years?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The first thing I would say—and most Committee members would know—is that the indigenous population is significantly overrepresented.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I know that.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: It is just worth making the point that we are very conscious of the fact that the indigenous population is overrepresented and, as a result of that, a whole series of programs have been implemented and we have sought to deal with indigenous incarceration. There is just over 20 per cent of male full-time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inmates and 29.6 per cent of females. The incarceration rates in New South Wales are high and that is why we have adopted a whole range of programs to try to deal with our indigenous population and how we can avoid that population continuing to grow.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Will you take on notice the question that I asked in terms of the specific numbers prepared with the last five years and the proportion of the prison population?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Yes, I am happy to take that on notice.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: How does the department determine which offenders will have access to accommodation in a Community Offender Support Program [COSP] centre?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will refer that question to the commissioner.

Mr WOODHAM: There are several ways of getting into a COSP centre. Firstly, the Parole Authority welcomes the accommodation we have available to us today because, as you know, it is nearly impossible to place some of these offenders, particularly sex offenders, in the community, particularly serious paedophiles, who are getting out of jail. One way is that it is a condition of the Parole Authority to go into a COSP centre as a stepping stone back into their own accommodation outside.

Secondly, every person who is placed on an extended supervision order by the Supreme Court, it is normally a condition that they be housed in a COSP centre for a significant period of time. We have some say in what the amount of time should be. Thirdly, if someone is out on parole or on another order in the community and they start to look a bit shaky, we think that rather than breaching them and putting them back into full-time custody we will bring them back into a COSP centre to try to straighten them out and keep them out of jail. They are the main ways that people are placed into a COSP centre.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: So it is either a condition of parole, a requirement of the court or it is some sort of transitional measure?

Mr WOODHAM: Yes.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: How many people would have fitted into that last category over the last 12 months or two years?

Mr WOODHAM: Quite a few; I cannot give you a specific number.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Could you be a bit more accurate?

Mr WOODHAM: By the end of this year we will have 500 beds available in the community that we manage. At the present stage we are tracking over 200 and I know over 200 people have been through the COSP centre so far and they have only been up and running this year.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I understand that the COSP centres are non-custodial. What restrictions are placed on residents of the centres? For example, are they free to travel or to move to external accommodation whenever they wish?

Mr WOODHAM: No, they cannot; not all of them. Let me give you an example of them not being able to freely move. Those who are on satellite tracking or electronic monitoring have to give us a schedule for each week of where they want to move so we can track them, particularly the heavy paedophile end, so that we know exactly where they are at any time. They cannot freely move around. Some of the others have restrictions on them from the Parole Authority where they cannot mix with certain individuals in the community. They could be involved in a domestic violence situation and they cannot go near the people they have previously been assaulting. Some of them, just the normal parolees in there who are difficult to place and cannot find accommodation initially when they get out of jail, are fairly free to move where they wish.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: So they use the centre as some sort of temporary accommodation?

Mr WOODHAM: But they have to be back in our facility by a certain time of the day, and that varies.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: What proportion of COSP centres are co-located with custodial centres?

Mr WOODHAM: None.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: What is the minimum qualification or training level required for employment in a COSP centre?

Mr WOODHAM: There is a training package that goes with it but most of the people in there have been trained in our department as probation and parole officers. I am not aware of any custodial staff that are working in a COSP centre. They go through their own training program. How long it is, I cannot tell you. I will take that on notice. I know they go through a special training program.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I might be able to assist with the training, if that suits. It is a five-week training program, which prepares them to manage the offenders in the COSP centre. Staff will undertake additional training in program delivery. I think the important point to make with the COSP centres is that this is actually about assisting a lot of these people to integrate successfully back into the community. I do not think that should be lost on anybody. This is about Corrective Services trying to assist these people re-integrate, to live law-abiding lives, get employment and access to programs and the like while they are in these COSP centres. So it is very focused on not seeing them again.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: You talked about the five-week training package for early probation and parole officers. What proportion of staff in the centres have specific training in coping with high-risk offenders?

Mr WOODHAM: That is part of the training package.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: It is part of it?

Mr WOODHAM: It is, and of course the community compliance group, which has more training again, supervises these people when they are out in the community. They have another level of training other than what the COSP staff have. The COSP staff are mainly housing and looking after the offenders when they are in the centre, but when they are out in the community there is another group that is more highly trained that looks after them.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Has any independent evaluation been undertaken of the COSP program? If so, what did that independent evaluation show? If not, will such an evaluation take place?

Mr WOODHAM: As they have only been going this year it is too early to do even a short-term evaluation. But I know that if you were talking to the Parole Authority here today, they would say that it works very well. We say that too, but we are going to link a proper evaluation into a university, and do it properly that way.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: When you say "link it into a university", you will get the university to—?

Mr WOODHAM: To do the review, yes.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Which university?

Mr WOODHAM: Hopefully, New South Wales.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Its faculty of social work?

Mr WOODHAM: Yes. Irene Baldry's group.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I now turn to lockdown regimes. Are inmates at Cessnock prison being locked down for an extra 32 hours a week as part of the implementation of The Way Forward reform program?

Mr WOODHAM: I know they are going in earlier than they used to, and there has been no difficulty with that. There has been not one complaint from an inmate, that I am aware of, or from the staff.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: That may reflect a degree of intimidation rather than a degree of happiness. I do not know.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I think it is important to make the point that I just do not accept this notion of intimidation. We run a program with official visitors that report directly to me. They regularly go to these correctional centres, they meet with the inmates, they meet with the general managers and the officers in these areas, and they report directly to me. With regard to the issue at Cessnock, none of that has been raised through the official visitors program, which is an independent group of people we put into these centres to make sure that there is independence and that the inmates have an opportunity through their program to make contact directly with my office.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Will you take on notice how much extra time is being spent in lockdown at Cessnock?

Mr WOODHAM: I can tell you that in the industry section there is hardly any difference; it is only the remands.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: If you can give me the details.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We will take it on notice.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Is it the case that inmates at the Long Bay Metropolitan Special Programs Centre are being locked down from 2.15 p.m. on Thursday through to 8.30 a.m. on Saturday every second week?

Mr WOODHAM: No.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Could you tell from the information how long they are being locked down?

Mr WOODHAM: To my knowledge, that does not happen—as you said—every fortnight at all.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: The information I have been given is that it is happening every fortnight. I would appreciate it if you could clarify that position. Are inmates at the Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre being locked down from 3.15 p.m. on Monday through to 8.30 a.m. on Wednesday each week?

Mr WOODHAM: That is not true.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Are they being locked down at all?

Mr WOODHAM: They may be. But I can tell you that that is not true.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: On a regular basis?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: They are locked down on a regular basis every afternoon and let go every morning. It is what we do.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: If you could get the information on whether there are any unusual extended periods of lock-down that seem to be occurring on a regular basis.

Mr WOODHAM: It is not on a regular basis.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: You are certainly aware, I presume, that section 53 of the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Regulation 2001 requires that each inmate is to be allowed at least two hours every day for exercise in the open air.

Mr WOODHAM: That is correct.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Could you provide me with data as to how often that regulation is not complied with?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I want to make the point that it is not normal in any correctional facility for us to periodically restrict inmate routine, other than if we facilitate searches or other contingencies to maintain security within the centre. So I just do not accept that there is some sort of routine going on. That generally only occurs if there are specific security issues that we have to deal with, or if we have issues with sick leave and those sorts of things. But apart from that it is normal for the routines to be maintained and continued in all our correctional centres. I do not want anyone leaving here thinking that somehow there is some practice going on where we are locking people in for 24 or 36 hours, or extended periods, and we are not meeting our obligations, other than in extraordinary circumstances.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: That is why I asked if you could take my question on notice, so that you can get back to me with a definitive statement.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We are happy to take it on notice, but I just want to make the point that it is not our normal practice, other than to maintain security and good order in our prisons or if there are issues associated with maintaining security because of sick leave.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: How is the department addressing the needs of inmates who require individual programs to address drug and alcohol and other issues? Are all programs run on a group basis, or are individual programs implemented when required?

Mr GRANT: The approach we have adopted over the last few years, having regard to the literature and efficiencies around treating people, is that a group-based approach is an effective way of implementing change with people. We run group-based programs. Last year we had over 4,000, or close to 5,000, inmates participating in group-based programs directly targeting alcohol, drugs and other addictions. We have drug and alcohol workers, and service and programs officers in some centres to do some one-on-one work with people. But you would appreciate that there is a benefit in spending an hour with 12 people, which would be an ideal group size, as opposed to an hour with one person, in terms of the number of people you can get an outcome with. As the evidence suggests, group-based programs are efficacious. That is a very good reason for us to pursue a group-based approach.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Mr Grant, my time for questions has expired, so I will come back to that matter on the next occasion.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Minister, when you were the head of Unions NSW you were, to put it mildly, a very strong voice for anti-privatisation in New South Wales. How can you continue to support the privatisation of Parklea prison when, until October 2008 when you became a member of the Government, you were vehemently against the privatisation of any State-owned assets?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I do not accept the premise of the question that I had some ideological objection. I think I have made that abundantly clear previously. But, to set the record straight, I have never had an ideological objection to privatisation. With regard to Parklea, again I do not accept the premise that we are privatising Parklea. I think it is important to make it abundantly clear here again that we are outsourcing the day-to-day operations of Parklea Correctional Centre. The Government will continue to own the assets of Parklea Correctional Centre. The structures, the land and the fixtures will all be owned by the Government and we will have a contract for the day-to-day operations for a period of five years. That contract will obviously be put in place in the normal course.

We will continue to operate two programs at Parklea. When I say "we" I am talking about Corrective Services New South Wales, on behalf of the Government, which will run CUBIT—the Custody-based Intensive Treatment Program for serious sex offenders—and we will also run the Violent Offenders Program when it comes to that area of Parklea prison. In addition, Justice Health will operate and provide health services inside Parklea Correctional Centre once we outsource the day-to-day operations of that centre. So I do not accept the premise on either level of the question.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I refer to the first part of your answer. On *Stateline* in August 2008 you said, "You can rest assured I won't be becoming an advocate for privatisation. I am not going to change who I am. I am not going to change my belief systems or my values, and I will continue to advocate for those." I am a little confused when you say you do not believe in privatisation. Are you against privatisation, or are you in favour of privatisation?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have answered that question. Firstly, I am not an ideologue when it comes to this. Secondly, with regard to Parklea we are not privatising Parklea. Privatisation, by its very nature, is a sale, and we are not selling Parklea prison; we are outsourcing the day-to-day operations of that centre. The Government will own all the fixtures, the structure, and the real estate associated with Parklea Correctional Centre.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: From that, do I take it that it is your Government's stance that—and I will use your words—outsourcing the entire operation of a prison for a five-year term is not privatisation?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We are not outsourcing the entire operation—I have said that already. I have said that the Government, through Justice Health, which is an arm of the Department of Health, will continue to provide all health services to inmates who are placed at the Parklea Correctional Centre. The Government, through Corrective Services New South Wales, will continue to run two of the programs that will be provided to inmates. In addition—and it is important to make this point—the Commissioner for Corrective Services will have control in terms of the classification of inmates; the Commissioner for Corrective Services will determine the number of inmates that are located at Parklea, in the same way as he does with all our other correctional centres in New South Wales; the officers will still have to be approved by the commissioner before they start work at the Parklea Correctional Centre; and the general manager in the end will be answerable to the commissioner for any matters associated with the security and operation of the Parklea Correctional Centre.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Minister, you would be familiar with the privatisation of electricity assets, in particular with the generator trader model. I want to ask you why is that termed by your Government as a "privatisation" when in the generator trader model the Government continues to own the generator assets, which is akin to the model here where the Government continues to own the asset—the prison—but outsources the product, if you like, to someone else to provide the service?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: That is a matter for the Minister for Finance.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: It is a matter that is definitional—

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: It is a matter for the Minister for Finance. The Minister for Finance is dealing with that particular matter and I suggest you refer your question to him.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: I just wonder when a privatisation is a privatisation and when it is not?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I know the Minister for Finance was here yesterday and got agitated, or some people here were agitated. That is a matter you need to refer to him.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: If I could return to a few areas that were touched on by the Hon. Roy Smith. When your Government announced that it would be seeking to invite tenders for the running of Parklea and Cessnock prisons—I will not use the word "privatisation"—it believed it would save \$16 million over three years. Now that your Government is only looking to call for tenders on Parklea—instead of using the word "privatise"—what are the projected savings to the Government over the same three-year period?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The saving associated with Parklea is approximately \$10 million.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Going back to Cessnock—

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Sorry, \$10 million per year over that period.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I took it to mean that, thank you. Going back to Cessnock, after the change in attitude or backflip, if I can use that term, that Cessnock jail would remain in public hands, your Labor colleague, the member for Cessnock, Kerry Hickey, indicated that he would ask you to rehire prison officers that were made redundant or transferred to other areas. You indicated that those officers should get in touch with the department and that the commissioner had been kept informed and was happy with the decision. Can you explain to me what the current progress is in re-employing all of those redundant officers—breaking down how many were made redundant and how many have been re-employed?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Everybody who took voluntary redundancy has been contacted in regards to re-employment. Obviously, anybody who comes back has to repay any redundancy payments they have received in line with government policy. I think you would be familiar with the Government's policy on this matter. We have made contact with those people and a number of those people who have decided to come back are back.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Again, if I could find out exactly how many were made redundant, or took redundancy, and how many as at this stage have in fact come back?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will take that on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Is the commissioner able to answer the question?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We will take it on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: What if someone had taken the redundancy and spent the money, or a good part of it—paid off their mortgage or did something else thinking they were out of a job—and then found themselves in the position that they wanted to desperately get back only to find out that they could not repay the money? They have been put in a position where they cannot be reinstated. Has any account been taken of someone in that position?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The Government has a policy and, as you would rightly expect, anybody who takes a redundancy from a government agency or department and comes back is required to repay the money.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I understand that.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: That is the standard practice.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: So if someone, due to circumstances that they were not expecting, is allowed to come back all of the sudden you do not see that they have been disadvantaged because they cannot be reinstated to where they were prior to the announcement?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The Government has a policy and the policy is not being altered for anybody.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I must say that I was a bit astounded that there was a committee looking at the issue of privatisation and prior to that committee publishing its report all of a sudden a decision was made to privatise Cessnock, then all of a sudden there was a complete backflip after redundancies and certain occurrences, and then the privatisation was ceased. Would it not have been more responsible for the Government to have first waited for the entire report and waited for the feedback before a decision was ever made or, more importantly, before any redundancies were accepted or even called for?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: From memory the report—and I am relying on my memory here—actually acknowledges that it is going to happen. I think that is the first point to make. The second point I would make is that you keep using the term "backflip". The Government made a conscious decision in light of what was happening to the community in Cessnock to review the decision on the outsourcing of the operations of the Cessnock Correctional Centre and, in light of that, took certain steps including making approaches to people

who had either transferred as a result of what they thought was a pending decision or took voluntary redundancies.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: You had certain people—this is what concerned me even during the period of the committee hearing—who felt they had no choice but to take or seek a transfer, pulled their kids out of school and sold their homes, were transferred or took a redundancy, suddenly to find out that there was a change of mind by the Government—I will not use the word "backflip"—and they found themselves in the position of asking why this happened to them.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: These people had choices and, again, I do not accept the premise of your question that they had no choices. These people were given a series of choices when it came to what the Government was proposing to do. They were given options. They could stay with Corrective Services and transfer—maintain their rank, existing rates of pay and be transferred elsewhere within Corrective Services in New South Wales—they could take voluntary redundancy, or they might choose to stay and apply for a job with the new operators of the centre. So I do not accept they had no choices. They had a series of choices open to them and people made a choice based on a set of circumstances they assumed might occur. Now, in light of the change, all those who transferred were given the opportunity, if they wanted to, to come back to Cessnock. I might add as I have travelled around the State I have met some of these people who transferred out of Cessnock. To give you an example, when I was in Cooma I met an officer who said the best thing he did was get transferred out of Cessnock, uproot his family and move to Cooma.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: A great town.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I see the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox nodding in agreement that it is a great town. It is a beautiful part of the world. A lot of these people have actually said to me that they are very appreciative that they were given the chance to transfer out of Cessnock. But they were still contacted and asked: Would you like to come back? The overwhelming majority have decided to stay where they were. Those that took voluntary redundancy were given the opportunity to make contact with Corrective Services and, as I said, in terms of the numbers I am happy to take that on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The large number of demonstrations over Cessnock, from the people of Cessnock, would tell me it was a little bit different about how they felt and the fact that your Government then changed its mind and succumbed to those objections would also paint another picture. But, Minister, I have to move on because we do not have all day, unfortunately.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Could I just say—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I turn to Parklea now, if I may. Was Parklea chosen because Mr Bindley is President of the Prison Officers Vocational Branch and is a serving officer at that establishment? There have been a number of indicators to say that it was almost a way of teaching the Prison Officers Vocational Branch a lesson. I just want to be assured that that is not the case?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have heard all sorts of conspiracy theories about why Parklea was selected. I have had Mr Bindley sitting at various locations talking to me about why Parklea was chosen. I have had officers at Parklea say to me, "Leave us alone and outsource Nowra"—the newest centre that is going to be opened in New South Wales. The fact is that Parklea was chosen—and I have put this on the record—because of its location, its age, the programs it runs and the like, and it was selected so that we can have an opportunity to look at a metropolitan jail that is outsourced and the security and work practices that are applied there. Likewise, we have Junee, which is operated by the private sector, and that gives us an opportunity to look at different classifications in a different location and the impact of the work practices there and, fundamentally, the impact it has on the local community.

Junee is a good example where the private sector operator consciously purchases a lot of goods and services from the local Junee community. When I go to Junee and meet with the locals, they love the fact that Junee Correctional Centre operates there and that the private sector operator utilises the goods and services from the local community and makes a contribution. They reciprocate in terms of their loyalty to the prison. I met with the woman who is the delegate at Junee Correctional Centre—I met with the two delegates there. She has been there since the establishment opened. She thinks that like any employer they have their ups and downs but it is a good business. Parklea, contrary to the conspiracy theories—and it is nice to see you guys take up the cudgels for the union movement and advocate on its behalf—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is what you used to do. I am surprised you would say that.

CHAIR: Order! Let the Minister answer the question.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: It is interesting that a group that previously backed WorkChoices at the election in 2007 and is still a strong advocate for those sorts of policies suddenly has some concern for the union movement. The fact is that Parklea was selected for the reasons I have outlined. You can sit around and develop all the conspiracy theories you like.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: To put an end to it, it had nothing to do with proportionally greater industrial problems or greater aspects of overtime or overtime not being controlled, as I think was once mentioned by the Commissioner?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: There was a fair bit of emotion around at the time. But the fact is it has been selected for those reasons I have talked about. What I cannot quite fathom is I speak at a conference of the Criminal Justice Coalition and Victor Dominello is there representing Greg Smith saying the Coalition supports Cessnock. Chris Hartcher is opposing Parklea, Greg Smith is supporting Parklea, and Victor Dominello is supporting Parklea. I am intrigued what your position is on Parklea.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: In March 2011 we can ask Minister Greg Smith those questions.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: You guys should not get ahead of yourselves; you should not count your chickens.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The Hon. Roy Smith touched on the court escort security service and I noted your answers. We are now four months into the expected \$5 million savings. Can you give an indication how much has been saved in the four-month period?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No. I can tell you that those discussions are ongoing and they are making progress. I have not had a formal report from the Industrial Relations Commission, in particular, the vice-president. What I have heard informally is that the discussions are making progress. Frankly, I do not think it is appropriate to draw a line and say that at this stage we are here or there. It is making positive progress.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Would you take it on notice and supply us with the savings that have occurred to date, or have been shown could occur?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I am happy to take it on notice and report back in terms of the progress that has been made, the issues that have been agreed to and the issues that are outstanding.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Is the \$5 million a line in the sand that cannot be crossed? If they do not come up with the \$5 million savings, that is it—the court escort service is outsourced.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We are going to make savings of \$5 million in regards to prisoner escort and court security.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: How many people are currently employed by the prisoner escort and court security unit?

Mr WOODHAM: About 460.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Can you indicate what amount of overtime is paid to the court escort and security unit?

Mr WOODHAM: Not offhand specifically, but it is significant.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Can you take the question on notice?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We will take it on notice.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Is it over the budgeted amount?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We will take it on notice.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Thank you—if you could indicate the budgeted amount and whether it has gone over budget. I move on to the incident of Adam Shipley, who took his life. I understand that in early 2009 William Beale, the department's former principal investigator, prepared a report into the death of Mr Shipley but the report was initially suppressed. Can you indicate why Mr Beale's report was suppressed?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The first point to make is that if there is a suggestion about anything untoward and you have evidence of that you should refer it to the appropriate authorities.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am not—

CHAIR: Order! The Minister is answering the question.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have read the full coronial report into the death of Adam Shipley. Obviously I extend my sympathies to Mr Shipley's family. I, and the Government, consider that every death in custody is a tragedy and one death is one too many. I know that he was a much-loved member of his family and obviously they are concerned. The Coroner's formal finding was that Adam Shipley died on 21 May 2007 at Kirkconnell by hanging. I previously announced that the Government would implement all the Coroner's recommendations in this case. I am advised by Corrective Services New South Wales that those matters are progressing.

On the Coroner's first recommendation, I have been advised that a review of the current policies and process for the management of at-risk inmates is underway. The review was designed to ensure that the systems in place provide for coordinated and proactive case management of inmates like Adam Shipley. In response to the Coroner's second recommendation, the Commissioner of Corrective Services has appointed an independent investigator, Mal Brammer, to look at the Corrective Services internal investigations. Mr Brammer has been deemed appropriate for this role, given his previous experience with the New South Wales Police Force and the Independent Commission Against Corruption as an investigator. On the Coroner's third and final recommendation, I am also advised that the Corrective Services New South Wales legal services branch has undertaken a review of procedures and implemented changes to its system to ensure that all investigative briefs are handed to the Coroner immediately following their finalisation. I am not sure whether the Commissioner has anything he would like to add.

Mr WOODHAM: No, other than to say that the Mal Brammer report is currently being assessed by the ICAC and I do not think we can say much more at this stage.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: If I could go back to the question: Why was his report initially suppressed? That is what I want an answer to.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: If you are suggesting some sort of cover-up that was raised at the inquest by William Beale, the Commissioner has referred this matter to the ICAC for investigation. Frankly, we cannot comment further at this point.

CHAIR: We will now go to Government members for questions.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: An ongoing challenge for the Government is ensuring it has ample capacity to accommodate the growing inmate population. What is the Government doing to ensure that it can do so?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The Government is committed to ensuring that the New South Wales correctional system has enough capacity to accommodate an increase in the inmate population. That is why this year the Government has delivered a record budget for Corrective Services New South Wales. In the financial year 2009-10 the Corrective Services New South Wales budget is a record \$936.9 million, which is a 2.8 per cent, or \$25.5 million, increase on the 2008-09 budget. A key priority of this allocation is to deliver a boost to prison bed numbers in New South Wales. Corrective Services will carry out a comprehensive program of capital works totalling \$129.7 million over the next 12 months. Most importantly, \$91 million is being

allocated for continuing work on development of an additional 1,000 inmate beds for the New South Wales correctional system.

A budget allocation of \$61.8 million is provided this financial year for the ongoing construction of the new South Coast Correctional Centre at Nowra. The total budget allocation for the construction of the centre is \$151 million. The contract for construction of the new correctional centre was awarded in June 2008. Construction is well underway and I am advised that it is on track for completion in 2010. Once this correctional centre is up and running it will create up to 200 jobs, pumping around \$10 million a year into the local community. This preference for local employment has been demonstrated at the Wellington Correctional Centre, where a significant proportion of the staff are local residents. The project has already helped the local economy, where it is estimated that construction is supporting 350 jobs in the area. The facility will accommodate 600 offenders, once it is fully operational.

The capital works budget also provides \$29 million for a 250-bed expansion at Cessnock Correctional Centre. This will generate up to 200 construction jobs for workers in the Hunter region once work gets underway. These two projects will increase the capacity of the New South Wales correctional system by almost 10 per cent. It represents a key element of our strategy in ensuring we have enough beds to accommodate the anticipated growth in our inmate population. As the inmate population rises, so does the need to expand the Corrective Services transport fleet. Therefore, the budget also provides funding for the renewal and expansion of the high-security prisoner transport fleet. This will involve a total of 24 maximum security vans being refurbished this financial year. The existing fleet of more than 130 inmate transport vehicles must also be maintained. The ongoing procurement of vehicle bodies and chassis continues.

This Government is supplying the infrastructure and resources necessary to ensure our prisons work effectively. Finally, to keep up with the increasing workload of community offender officers, their offices are being progressively upgraded across the State in many regional and metropolitan centres. This is providing efficient, modern facilities and is greatly assisting the large number of offenders managed in the community. A number of specialised facilities, known as Community Offender Support Program centres, which have been referred to earlier, are also under development, with new facilities already opened at Campbelltown, Malabar, Emu Plains, Windsor and Kempsey. These facilities support a non-custodial community-based service where offenders on parole, and that includes court-based parole, or a community-based sentence can reside and participate in programs aimed at reducing reoffending, protecting the community and assisting in the resettlement process through the involvement of community services.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, you have already spoken in answer to some earlier questions about the importance of rehabilitation in corrective services. It is clear that rehabilitation plays an important and vital role in correctional centres across New South Wales. Can you please advise what programs have been put in place by Corrective Services NSW to reduce the rate of recidivism?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Corrective Services NSW delivers a wide range of programs and services designed to reduce the rate of reoffending amongst offenders. The Government is therefore committed to helping break the cycle of crime. This does not mean we are softening our stance in regard to unacceptable behaviour in our community. The Government will continue to make no apology for being tough on crime. The tightening up of sentencing legislation, the continued use of intelligent policing strategies and more officers on the beat targeting repeat offenders means that if you do the crime you will do the time. But the Government also knows that education and rehabilitation of inmates are key ingredients in trying to ensure that they can break away from their criminal past. This focus is clearly producing results.

Compared with other jurisdictions, Corrective Services NSW now has the third-highest percentage of inmates enrolled in secondary school courses. It also has a range of therapeutic programs to target the causes of criminal behaviour and work programs that employ over 5,500 inmates every day. Corrective Services NSW, in partnership with other agencies, has taken serious steps to stop reoffending by implementing a number of innovative new court-based programs to make repeat offenders turn away from a life of crime. These include the Drug Court, with proven results in reducing rates of reoffending; reforms to the fines system, including flexible payment options and new work development orders, to stop vulnerable people getting caught up in a cycle of secondary offending; forum sentencing where offenders are made to face up to their crimes by being forced to confront their victims; and the Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment [MERIT] program, which allows magistrates to refer offenders with drug problems into treatment prior to sentencing.

Corrective Services NSW has also implemented a broad range of programs specifically aimed at inmates deemed to be at a medium or high risk of reoffending. These programs include the Two Ways Together program, which assists Aboriginal offenders to reintegrate into their local Aboriginal community; the Sober Driver program, which has successfully reduced reoffending by repeat adult drink-drive offenders at rates of nearly 50 per cent; and the Pathways to Employment, Education and Training [PEET] program, which helps medium and high risk offenders to successfully complete vocational education courses at TAFE.

The Pathways to Employment, Education and Training program is an excellent example of a community-based program that has been adapted to suit the needs of Aboriginal offenders. I am advised that, in 2007-08, 43 different courses were held at 22 locations throughout the State. I was also recently honoured to attend the official opening of Balunda-a, which is a second-chance program for young adult indigenous offenders located at Tabulam in northern New South Wales. That facility was opened by the Governor, Professor Marie Bashir, who takes a very keen interest in young people, and particularly young offenders. The Balunda-a program is the first of its kind in Australia and is already producing positive outcomes. Of the 14 offenders who have completed the program, magistrates have determined that 13 had made such progress that a sentence of imprisonment was not warranted upon their return to court.

All of these programs, plus many more, highlight the commitment of the Government to giving offenders the opportunity to contribute positively to the community after they have completed their sentence. We also have brand-new initiatives coming online this year, similarly developed in partnership with other agencies. They include youth conduct orders, which would require young people and their families to confront the causes of their offending behaviour, and a new court supervision program called Court Referral of Eligible Defendants into Treatment [CREDIT]. These initiatives, backed up by a tough criminal justice system with deterrence at its core, will help us to keep driving down the rates of crime.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, around two years ago Corrective Services NSW created a new group to be responsible for monitoring serious offenders in the community. Can you please give the committee an update on how this has progressed?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The Community Compliance Group [CCG] was formed by the amalgamation of the Corrective Services Offender Compliance and Monitoring Unit and the Special Visitation Group in 2007. The group plays an essential role in supervising serious offenders in the community, as it is responsible for monitoring high risk and high profile offenders. The CCG closely monitors these offenders by undertaking unannounced home visits, conducting observations and surveillance operations, and performing random breath analysis and urinalysis tests. Other monitoring strategies include psychological profiling and intelligence gathering and analysis.

The CCG is also responsible for the case management, supervision and monitoring of serious sex offenders on Supreme Court imposed extended supervision orders made under the Crimes (Serious Sex Offenders) Act 2006. In selected cases the CCG will also assume case management responsibilities for other serious and/or high risk offenders identified by the Commissioner of Corrective Services. The CCG has carriage of the supervision of all offenders subject to electronic monitoring conditions across a variety of orders, including home detention orders, Drug Court orders, and all inmate external leave programs, such as day or weekend leave for family reintegration or work release.

The intensity and seriousness of managing these offenders on a regular basis requires highly skilled staff to perform a dual role involving both authority and support. Community Compliance Group officers assist offenders to comply with case management plans but, at the same time, ensure that the compliance and monitoring aspects of their orders are being followed. Conducting unannounced home visits outside business hours provides CCG staff with an opportunity to random breath test and urine test offenders. This allows for a more accurate depiction of an offender's adherence to conditions of his or her order and progress in relation to drug and alcohol treatment and maintenance of abstinence. Also, such visits provide an opportunity to verify an offender's accommodation and living situation.

Since the inception of the service in May 2007 the CCG has played a vital role in keeping the community safe. For instance, in the financial year 2008-09 the CCG conducted 13,993 visits and, as a result, 70 breaches were detected. Of the 70 breaches detected, 48 offenders have now returned to custody. The CCG is currently operational at seven locations—Bathurst, Blacktown, Campbelltown, Dubbo, Newcastle, Wagga Wagga and Wollongong. In response to the success of the CCG Corrective Services NSW is expanding the service. The CCG is now being regionalised across the State, with additional units being planned for another

four locations—Broken Hill, Grafton, Goulburn and Tamworth. A recruitment process for these units is underway, and it is hoped this action will be finalised by the end of this year.

This expansion is also in line with the express wishes of the judiciary to be able to offer equity in sentencing options outside the Sydney metropolitan area. Having the CCG operate in regional areas will allow the expansion of the Home Detention Program by providing monitoring and supervision that would not otherwise necessarily be available.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: How did Corrective Services New South Wales deal with the threat of swine flu in our prisons?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Corrective Services New South Wales continues to revisit and update its contingency planning and implementation strategies to deal with the current contained outbreak of H1N1 influenza, or swine flu, in the New South Wales correctional system. The Government has had to ensure that in addressing all possible contingencies in the event of any further spread of H1N1 influenza, or swine flu, it keeps the ongoing threat of further spread in perspective. Should the influenza pandemic develop further, there will inevitably be significant health, social and economic effects. For example, the absence of a large number of employees can pose a threat to the continuity of critical services and the maintenance of infrastructure. In such a scenario, the continuous safe and secure management of New South Wales correctional centres will be critical.

Corrective Services has once before shown great ability to deal with a health crisis, albeit of a different nature. In the early 1990s, when confronted with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, it ran a highly successful campaign of informing, educating and training staff in how to deal with the challenges presented by the crisis. The same proactive response has been introduced in respect of the present threat occasioned by the H1N1 virus. In the correctional system there is a clear duty of care to protect both staff and inmates who respectively work and reside in correctional centres. The advice from New South Wales Health to the public—but which has equal relevance to Corrective Services staff and those in its care—is to adopt an enhanced and heightened awareness towards any flu-like symptoms. In the event of any worsening of the epidemic, the primary aim of everybody concerned with the welfare of staff and inmates is prevention in the first instance followed by containment and protection.

While there are currently no nationally agreed infection control guidelines for Australian correctional centres, Corrective Services New South Wales is well advanced in establishing policies and procedures that adhere to the requirements of the New South Wales Health Human Influenza Pandemic Plan. It is worth noting that Corrective Services New South Wales has provided assistance to the Western Australian Department of Corrective Services by way of sharing information on protocols, screening templates and training packages. Since December 2007, Corrective Services New South Wales has had pandemic planning as a corporate objective. In practical terms, this has resulted in the development and dissemination of an H1N1 Influenza Management Protocol; and senior officer representation on two interdepartmental committees—namely, the Pandemic Influenza Interagency Planning Committee, and the Infectious Diseases Emergency Planning Committee, which was established to develop a joint influenza pandemic action plan.

Approximately 25 per cent of Corrective Services staff across all disciplines have been trained in infection control and the correct use of personal protective equipment. More than 30 trainers are now in place to deliver this training in local workplaces. Primary training for recruits at the Corrective Services Academy now includes training in infection control and the use of personal protective equipment. A stockpile of approved personal protective equipment has been created and securely stored at a central metropolitan location. Corrective Services New South Wales is now on a national register for ongoing access to personal protective equipment should shortages occur. The department is currently trialling various forms of hand sanitiser equipment to increase hand hygiene. Corrective Services has established communication and protocol lines with New South Wales Health and Justice Health, which is the lead agency in pandemic planning.

Perhaps with considerable foresight, a pandemic flu desktop exercise was conducted in December 2008 involving staff from Justice Health and metropolitan correctional centres and transport staff to prepare contingency plans. Justice Health has implemented an inmate screening document specifically designed to alert for influenza symptoms. In the event of a confirmed case of influenza linked to the pandemic, a workplace screening process has been developed for correctional centre staff and visitors. The department is confident that it is best prepared to meet the threat level of the H1N1 pandemic or another epidemic. All responses by Corrective Services New South Wales to such threats are based on advice from Justice Health, which in turn

derives its policies and procedures based on directives from New South Wales Health and the National Incident Reporting Centre. This includes directives on the use of antivirals and vaccinations.

The latest figures show that 220 correctional centre inmates have been isolated owing to influenza-like illness since the start of the pandemic, with 20 currently isolated; 151 inmates have been prescribed the Tamiflu anti-viral medication; 24 inmates have been confirmed with H1N1, although it should be noted that swab testing is no longer being conducted; three inmates have been admitted to hospital as a result of the virus; and three staff have been approved access to the special leave provisions of the Pandemic MOU Award. In anticipating future developments, Corrective Services New South Wales is in discussions with New South Wales Health regarding the expected dissemination of the H1N1 vaccine. Corrective Services New South Wales and Justice Health staff should be congratulated on their outstanding work in dealing with the pandemic.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I understand that Corrective Services New South Wales last week commenced the rollout phase of mobile phone sniffer dogs. What steps is the Government taking to keep mobile phones and other contraband out of our prisons?

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: This question was asked in the House. I think the question was, "Who let the dogs out?"

CHAIR: It is not the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox's time for asking questions and he should not waste other members' time.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Minister, you can table the answer if you like.

CHAIR: You are not running the hearing, so do not waste other members' time.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The presence of any form of contraband in correctional centres throughout New South Wales will quite simply not be tolerated. Contraband has many faces, be it illicit drugs or mobile phones, and we are always looking for new ways to expand the armoury provided to our correctional officers to enable them to detect it. A mobile phone in the hands of an inmate poses a significant threat to the safety of prison staff and the community at large. They allow inmates to carry on their criminal activity from within the prison walls, and that is a serious concern.

That is why the Government last week delivered on its commitment to have mobile phone detection dogs available for use within the State's correctional centres. The deployment of the two dogs was a result of the successful completion of the trial project and a tribute to the hard work and dedication of Corrective Services New South Wales officers in keeping our community safe. It is also an Australian first. These two dogs now form part of a number of strategies in correctional centres that are used to stop the trafficking of contraband, such as the use of metal detectors, intelligence-based and random searches of inmates and cells, and contraband searches of prison visitors.

While this is an ongoing challenge in every modern prison system, it is clear that Corrective Services New South Wales is working very hard to keep contraband out. On 9 September, New South Wales correctional officers and police seized more than \$44,000 in cash and a quantity of drugs from the boot of a vehicle parked in the visitors car park at the Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre at Silverwater. The drugs found included marijuana, amphetamines and a white powder substance that is still to be identified. A knife and smoking implement were also located in the visitor's car. Police have taken possession of the contraband and questioned the persons involved. This incident demonstrates the capabilities of Corrective Services New South Wales staff and, in particular, the efficiency and effectiveness of the K9 unit. Visitors are taking a very big risk if they attempt to smuggle contraband into our prisons.

Last year, a total of 54,930 searches were conducted on visitors to correctional centres. This was coupled with a total of 392,116 drug searches of inmates. In 2008, 786 visitors were banned from visiting owing to the smuggling of contraband and 140 visitors were charged with related offences. Corrective Services New South Wales is also developing better intelligence-gathering methods, using drug detection dogs and monitoring inmate communications more closely than ever before.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: If I could return to the issue of drug and alcohol programs, Minister, you may wish to take this question on notice. How many inmates participated in an individual program in each of the past five years?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We will take that on notice.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: How many alcohol and other drug [AOD] positions currently exist in each New South Wales correctional centre?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Are you talking about positions as in rehabilitation positions or people who provide the training?

Ms SYLVIA HALE: People who work in the prisons and conduct sessions with prisoners.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Mr Grant can answer.

Mr GRANT: I do not have the data for every centre.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We will take that on notice.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Could you also take on notice, if you do not know the answer, how many of these are solely AOD positions and how many are combined with welfare positions?

Mr GRANT: I think are referring to a new classification of work we have called service and programs officer. There are currently 32 service and programs officers. I would not say they are just a combined job; they perform a broader role, including assessment. They take on some of the functions traditionally done by welfare officers and drug and alcohol workers. There are 32 of those positions in existence around the State. There are 91 drug and alcohol worker positions and there are 89 welfare officer positions.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Is it proposed to amalgamate the drug and alcohol positions with the welfare positions and produce the service and programs officer?

Mr GRANT: Currently we are in negotiation with the Public Service Association about the ongoing role of both positions. The position we have taken is that where a position becomes vacant we will replace that position with a service and programs officer. In the future we may seek to change other people's roles but our preferred model for service delivery is to have one of these new positions, which we believe provides a more holistic approach to managing drug and alcohol and welfare positions.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Why do you think it is preferable given, presumably, that welfare officers deal with matters like banking or other domestic problems prisoners can have, whereas a drug and alcohol counsellor is looking specifically at those problems? It does not seem to me that there is an automatic connection between the two.

Mr GRANT: The first point, as we were alluding to earlier, is that we have made a move towards a group-based approach to treatment. Given that our first priority is to reduce reoffending, we have looked at the staff we have and we have examined what we think is the best possible approach utilising that staff to get the outcomes that we are seeking. We believe the group-based approach works. There is simply no evidence that talking works. If someone sits down and empathises with an offender, makes them feel good about the experience, that is not going to produce the outcome we want. So we are trying to move people towards a group-based model. As to the positions we are putting in place, there are two positions that will participate in group work delivery in the jails—a service and programs officer position and another new position we have created that is called a program facilitator position.

So when you mentioned before that we were merging the positions, we are also creating another category of worker—we have about 20 of those in place now—which is called a program facilitator. They will perform a higher level of program facilitation and have oversight, usually co-facilitating with another worker. Going back to your question about why we believe these positions were more effective, we have had years of experience with a more holistic position of probation and parole officers who deal with all of those issues. They deal with family issues, drug and alcohol issues, and other criminal thinking and antisocial aspects of a person. Our argument is that it is better to have one worker who can deal more holistically with people.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: But the suggestion is that you are going to introduce the program facilitator positions and it seems to me there will be another level of bureaucracy and administration rather than direct contact with prisoners.

Mr GRANT: No, the positions provide an entirely hands-on role but most of our group work programs are co-facilitated so you have two facilitators working with inmates. We are trying to improve the quality of those group interactions. There is lots of information around in the world about failed correctional treatment programs where insufficient regard has been paid to the skills and capacity of people to deliver programs of the highest standard. We have identified what we think those qualities are and we have created a training program in partnership with Macquarie University to develop a high-level skills program facilitator. That is what these positions do, operating in the jails but also operating in the community. So those positions have more flexibility to operate in both those locations.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: How long will those training programs last?

Mr GRANT: The training program for the program facilitator occurs over a 12-month period. So, when people apply for those jobs they do an initial period of face-to-face program work and then they get a level of clinical supervision and oversight. They work under the supervision of the person who monitors them. We film their facilitation activities and we assess them and develop their skills over that time. So the whole process is on-the-job training plus a more intensive face-to-face program at the beginning of the program.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: So people who are currently working in alcohol and other drug positions will have access to this training.

Mr GRANT: A number of those people who were in alcohol and other drug positions have applied and have been successfully recruited for the program facilitator positions. When they have done that they have taken on this additional level of training. However, in addition to that, for every program that we run we have a sort of quality approach where, at the head office level, we have a group of people who go out in the field and assist and train on specific aspects of program delivery. The drug and alcohol workers will participate in that.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: What happens to people who do not apply to participate in this program? Will they continue to hold their jobs?

Mr GRANT: Yes. At this stage, as I mentioned, the only thing we have on the table is a discussion about replacing drug and alcohol worker positions with these new positions when they are vacated. If I can just add one other point as well, which is the point you made about welfare services. The other thing we are trying to do increasingly is to make offenders more responsible for their own issues. To achieve that we have provided more opportunities for people to have access to service providers. So we bring more service providers into the system, like Centrelink and other agencies that are providing services to people, like Housing dealing with debts with the State Debt Recovery Office, and so on. At the moment our approach is to provide more access to people in custody to those services without necessarily requiring a welfare officer to be the intermediary.

In addition to that, we have created a number of free telephone access numbers where offenders can access services and use the telephone to access things themselves. To assist them to have the skills and to understand how to access these agencies, we have developed two group work programs that are basically developing skills and understanding their rights and responsibilities, and so on. So we have a group-based approach and more emphasis on people taking responsibility for themselves. Finally, we also expect custodial staff in correctional centres, which is one of our major investments, to broaden their functions. So when custodial staff take on any case management role we expect them to have regard to families and other things and to intervene where it is appropriate on some of these issues with inmates too.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Given that a substantial number of prisoners will be either illiterate or innumerate or have other problems, surely there will be greater need for interaction on an individual level with prisoners if they are going to be able to take advantage of being able to phone someone.

Mr GRANT: One of the things we do very well at this stage is assessments of people's levels of literacy. We have a good understanding of the nature of people's literacy competency, numeracy competency, and so on. On the basis of that we can target people for adult basic education programs. We have significantly increased over the past years our participation rates. So our preference would be to see the people in jail so they do some adult basic education first of all and then they move into other programs. The people who run our

programs are also very aware of people with literacy problems and the programs we run are based on understanding what level of literacy someone might have.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Has the ratio of the total number of AOD and welfare positions, or whatever their equivalent will be, to inmates increased or decreased over the last five years?

Mr GRANT: I have to take that on notice. I would suspect it has increased if you added together all the different classifications.

Mr WOODHAM: And new jails opening.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: What proportion of offenders with histories of violence undertake the Violent Offenders Therapeutic Program during the time they are in prison?

Mr GRANT: I will have to get back to you on the exact proportion but I can tell you that the Violent Offender Treatment Program is only one of our avenues for treatment. There is an intensive program, a lower-risk program. There are a number of other programs that target aggression and violence, including the anger management program, a program that is called Controlling Anger and Learning to Manage It, or CALM. All these programs will contribute to that reduction. So it might be best if I answer on the proportion of people who need it.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Also, can you give me an answer in relation to the Behaviour Analysis and Therapy Program and data on various waiting lists for entry to that program, and also whether all offenders complete the program during their detention? If not all of them complete it, what proportion do?

Mr WOODHAM: I will add that we are just about to open a new violence prevention program at Parklea, which will double intake. Also, we are planning to, and will introduce, a further violence prevention program for violent offenders at Cessnock when the new 250 beds are completed.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I turn now to Cessnock. What will be the reduction in full-time positions at Cessnock as a result of the implementation of the new management plan at that site?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I think the point to make is that there is an expansion on track of 250 beds at Cessnock that I have already referred to when I talked about the budget, so in fact we are going to see the size of Cessnock expand. The management plans are being rolled out across the State and it is about better utilisation of our staff and in many centres we will see an increase in numbers. This is not about staff reduction but about better placement of staff, utilising these management plans so that we move away from some of these work practices where people were being rostered into areas of the correctional centre where there was nobody located. It is about changing the way we do let-goes, lock-ins and a whole series of those things. I think this notion that somehow we are reducing staff numbers and there is going to be a compromise in security is a completely wrong premise to take when you come to these questions, with respect. This is about how we safely and securely let go, lock in and roster prison officers for the purposes of securing the jail and their own security.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Minister, would you take on notice how many full-time positions there will be at Cessnock and what the reduction in those full-time positions will be?

Mr WOODHAM: There will be no reductions.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: You are saying there will be no reduction whatsoever?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We are expanding the operations of Cessnock—and I think the commissioner is in a position to give you a detailed answer—which is not going to see a reduction in staffing numbers.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I am talking about a reduction in full-time staffing numbers. If you could give me the numbers as to the size of the increase in full-time staff at Cessnock, I would appreciate that.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I just want to make the point that we are also, throughout the whole of our corrections system, rolling out casual prison officers. I do not want to just simply be saying we are going

to tell you how many full-time officers there are going to be at Cessnock jail because we are also supplementing our existing workforce for a whole range of reasons with casual prison officers. They are prison officers who undertake the 11-week training program, just as every other prison officer does. We are now up to about, from memory, 220 prison officers who are employed as casuals.

I should just make the point that in the last graduation class, 42 per cent were women. It is the highest intake of women we have had in our training program. I have met with some of these women, and the attraction to get into corrective services, with the option of being casual, is the flexibility it provides many of these women to get back into the workforce after they have taken a break to raise children and the like. When we get to this notion of staffing, we ought to be talking about full-time equivalents. I do not want to get to this notion of permanents and what we are doing, because we are employing casuals and we are utilising them throughout the centres and the system to deal with issues like overtime, sick leave, providing flexibility and giving us the capacity to increase the number of women who are actually working as prison officers in our system.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Thank you, but I gather you will take my question on notice?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No, let me be very clear about what I will come back to you on. We will come back to you on full-time equivalents.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: That is not the question I have asked.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: But your question is based on the wrong premise.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: If you will not answer the question I will move on.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: With respect, Madam Chair, I would like to answer the question.

CHAIR: Order! The Minister has answered the question the way in which he has chosen to answer the question. If you wish to persist with that question, you have the option of putting it on notice after the hearing. Please proceed.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I would like, Minister, for your comments as to the way in which the department has negotiated the new management plan with staff and their union at Cessnock. Can I read to you, for example, from an email received on 16 August 2009, which, apart from talking about this enormous blow-out in Senior Executive Service positions that have been introduced, then goes on to say, "Meanwhile they have come up—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Point of order: I seek your guidance and clarification, Madam Chair. I understand the question is being directed to the Minister about an anonymous email.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I will tell you the name. I was not given the chance.

CHAIR: Order! I will have the clock stopped. Ms Hale, there is a point of order and we need to deal with it appropriately.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I received an email on 16 August 2009 from the Secretary of Cessnock Prison Officers Vocational Branch, which in part states:

Meanwhile they [DCS] have come up with a Management Plan that drastically reduces the staffing profile of Cessnock Correctional Centre and allows for very little inmate programs. Our Industries Manager believes that this plan will seriously effect the viability of the Demountables Business Unit, as the time that can be realistically allowed for inmates to work is shortened by about an hour.

We have been told by Mr. Woodham that we have had ample time to negotiate and that these plans will come in on the 24th August whether we like it or not. In reality we have been given the Management Plan, told by management that it was going to be changed and refined and negotiations will happen later. Mr. McLean came to Cessnock to talk to the Unions but made no effort to facilitate the Union Executive actually being there. Mr. Howen was on a day off, Mr. Jones our Vice Chair was on Holidays and Mr. Williams and myself were both on Afternoon Shift. The only union representative on duty was one of our junior delegates, as he correctly declined to discuss anything, we as a union, were accused of refusing to meet with Mr. McLean. Mr. McLean left Cessnock before Mr. Williams and I started work at 2.30pm.

I really want your comments. Do you think that is as an adequate way in which to negotiate agreements with staff in the introduction of new management plans?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: First of all, I have not intervened in the day-to-day operation and industrial relations arrangements with our correctional—

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Perhaps it is time you did.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No, it is not the role of a Minister to intervene in the simple roll-out of management plans as part of a reform process when these management plans are not just being rolled out at Cessnock; they are being rolled out at a whole range of correctional centres quite successfully, implementing a set of improvements to the way we do a whole range of activities in our correctional centres. That is appropriately left with the commissioner and his staff as an operational matter. I do not intend, as much as people might like me to because of my former role, to intervene simply because a management plan is put on the table and somebody does not like it and the union or you expect me to intervene.

There are a set of processes available to those individuals through dispute settlement procedures in their awards, collective agreements and the like, to deal with these matters and I am quite sure that the Chair of the Prison Officers Vocational Branch at Cessnock is aware of his rights and his capacity to take these matters to a whole range of different places, including the Industrial Relations Commission, to have a dialogue facilitated if they have particular issues about management plans. My recollection is that at one other centre—it might be Cessnock, and the commissioner can correct the record on this—they, in fact, did exercise their rights to go to the Industrial Relations Commission about a management plan and the implementation of that management plan. The fact is that I am not going to intervene in ongoing issues associated with the roll-out of a minor reform with management plans. These people are quite free to exercise their rights and, quite frankly, if they are not happy, I encourage them to exercise their rights under their awards.

[Interruption]

CHAIR: Order! Ms Hale, I ask you to retract those comments; they are completely outside the guidelines for the conduct of budget estimates.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I withdraw. It is not right that I should make that comment.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Madam Chair, could the commissioner just add something to this answer?

CHAIR: Yes, he may.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I do not think they were actually withdrawn.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I withdraw the remark.

Mr WOODHAM: Can I ask the date of that email?

Ms SYLVIA HALE: It was 16 August 2009.

Mr WOODHAM: It is a totally inaccurate email; I can tell you that for a start, like some of the other information you get.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: So could you—

CHAIR: Order! Ms Sylvia Hale cannot ask any further questions. Mr Woodham is answering the original question.

Mr WOODHAM: Firstly, they had many months to negotiate at a local level on the management plan. The State executive instructed the local branches not to do it. They had plenty of time. They knew what the management plan involved. So when we introduced the management plan they went to the industrial commission. As the Minister said, we implemented what was called a rolling let-go and a rolling lock-in, which enhances staff safety like never before. To give you an example, they said they did not have enough staff. Where they used to let 100 prisoners go with eight officers, when we put in the rolling let-go and the rolling lock-in nearly 30 officers went to the wing to undo the cells and let the prisoners out. I think they had two cells

each to open. It totally annihilated their opposition to the management plan. In fact, the chairman of the local branch has conceded defeat on it and there is not an issue there now. It is working well.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: I turn to public sector reform.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I anticipated that.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Approximately how many discussions did you have with the Premier about the detail of his public sector restructure plan prior to his announcing it on 11 June 2009?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: These reforms are the most significant reforms that we have seen in the public sector for some time.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: How many discussions did you have?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: In June the Premier announced the most extensive set of reforms to the structure of the New South Wales public sector. The public sector now comprises 13 departments, each with its own director general. The two key goals of the reforms are the reduction of waste and inefficiencies in the sector and delivering better front-line services.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: I understand the reforms. I am asking you how many discussions you had with the Premier before he announced the reforms.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will answer your question. This is designed to streamline and deliver better value for services and better efficiencies for the people of New South Wales. For example, the creation of the Department of Transport and Infrastructure will see better results for the travelling public.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Point of order: I have limited time. I asked the Minister a direct question about the discussions he had with the Premier before the reforms were announced. I do not need a diatribe about what the reforms did. I asked about the discussions he had prior to their announcement by the Premier. Can you ask the Minister to answer the direct question?

CHAIR: The same rules apply here as apply in the Chamber when answering questions: answers must be generally relevant. The Minister should proceed along that vein.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Merging community services, housing, ageing and disability, juvenile justice and Aboriginal affairs into the new Department of Human Services will see better services delivered to the State's most vulnerable people. That is what these reforms are about: improving services to the people of New South Wales. While the Government will achieve savings, the Premier has made it clear that no worker will lose their job or be made forcibly redundant. This Government is committed to secure employment for New South Wales workers, and it is our number one priority. The consolidation of corporate services in the super agency—

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: You do not intend to answer the question so I will move on.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Do you want an answer?

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: On what date did you brief Cabinet and the Labor Party caucus about the public sector restructure prior to the Premier's announcement?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: These matters were announced by the Premier, and the Premier provided briefings on these matters because they are of significant—

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: So you have nothing to do with—

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: My role in here, as part of this process, is to sit on the Cabinet subcommittee for better service delivery, and I am part of that committee for the roll-out. In terms of briefings and the like, that was a matter for the Premier because of the significance of these reforms. As I said at the outset, these are the most significant reforms to the public sector in 30 years. My role is to be part of that committee to see the roll-out and implementation, because this is about our capacity as a government to deliver

front-line services more effectively by achieving efficiencies through improving back office functions and the merging of back-office functions and dealing with it in that fashion.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: So you have been involved after the Premier announced the reforms?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will not go into my discussions with the Premier on this matter.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: I have noted that. Did you have discussions with any representatives of the Queensland Government prior to replicating its plan in New South Wales for the restructure?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The short answer to that is no. In relation to this notion that somehow this is a replication of the Queensland—I know you keep harping on about that but the fact is that this is a set of reforms that have been developed for the purposes of New South Wales. They are not a set of reforms that are identical to those that apply in Queensland.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: I seek leave to table the New South Wales Government structure and the Queensland Government structure. I have a couple of questions for the Minister about that.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: What is it?

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: It is very simple. It is an organisational structure. I have a copy for the Minister.

CHAIR: The procedure is that the Committee will have to accept the document and move to publish it before we can hand it to the Minister for comment.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Can you explain to us what it is precisely?

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: It is the Queensland Government structure of departments and the New South Wales Government structure. The Minister just said that the New South Wales Government structure was done independently and has no reference to the Queensland structure.

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

CHAIR: Is leave granted to table the document?

Leave granted.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Have you seen the Queensland Government structure before?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: This document?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: I will point out a couple of uncanny similarities. Were you aware that there are six clusters, as opposed to six policy groupings, in Queensland and New South Wales, and that each of those policy groupings has the same name? If you had a colour version they would have the same colour on both pieces of paper.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have not seen this before now.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: I think it speaks for itself in terms of the duplication in that regard.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have not seen it before today.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: You have never seen this before today?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have not seen the Queensland document as you have just put on the table before now.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: So in developing the New South Wales Government structure you did not look at any other State structures to see what best practice might have been?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have said to you that I will not go into any discussions I have had with the Premier on this matter. I have not seen this document before today.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: In developing your structure independently, did you have a look at what other States were doing?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have just said to you I have not seen this document before today.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: I am asking a different question. I am asking whether you considered any other structures.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will not enter into any discussions I have had with the Premier on these matters.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: I am not asking about your discussions with the Premier. I am asking you whether, in your capacity as Minister for Public Sector Reform, in working up the New South Wales structure, you looked at other organisational structures for departments in other States to determine best practice.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have already outlined my role in this matter.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Did you have any discussions with Phil Koperberg, the member for Blue Mountains, prior to the implementation of your plan?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: In so far as it deals with the Rural Fire Service being lumped in with Police?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Why did you quietly remove Local Government from the Planning super department? Why was that done after the initial announcement of the plan?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Point of order: I am not looking to be difficult but I refer to the prefacing of "quietly remove". The honourable member needs to be clear about what he is trying to underline his position with.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Why did you make that change?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: From time to time these things are reassigned as part of a process, and refinements were made before a final document was developed and put on the table for the purpose of these agencies. With regard to this notion that somehow these things appear and, bang, that is it, the fact is that a refinement was made.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: You were not able to make that refinement before you released the initial restructure package?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: As I just said, there was a process of consultation and a refinement made in that area.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: As the Minister for Public Sector Reform, did you have any responsibility for the announcement made by the Premier that he planned to reform the public sector by banning public servants from drinking bottled water? Is it something you knew about before he announced that?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I do not see that as a matter that is relevant to public sector reform.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: It certainly was a matter that the Premier was very keen to look at in terms of reforming how the public sector uses bottled water.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I do not think it is a matter of reform for the purposes of public sector reform.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Minister, do you have someone in your office who is responsible specifically for legislation or legislative liaison for public sector reform?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have advisers that deal with my areas of responsibility of Corrective Services, and they deal with public sector reform, yes.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: That person deals with all your ministerial responsibilities, in terms of the legislative program coming forward?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have answered that question. I have two people who deal with public sector reform.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Have you had any meetings with the Public Service Association at which you discussed the restructure plan?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No, I do not recollect that I have.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Ms McPherson, are you the officer responsible in the department in relation to the restructure?

Ms McPHERSON: Yes, I am.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Could you advise the Committee what discussions you heard in relation to the restructure prior to the Premier's announcement?

Ms McPHERSON: With whom?

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: With the Premier.

Ms McPHERSON: With the Premier personally? I dealt with some of his staff.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Did you have discussions with the Minister prior to the Premier's announcement about the restructure?

Ms McPHERSON: Yes, I did.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: How long before were those discussions? When did they occur?

Ms McPHERSON: I cannot recollect. There was some time in the planning of those.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Was it days? Was it a week before?

Ms McPHERSON: It was not days, no. It was some time before.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: "Some time" would be a week before?

Ms McPHERSON: No, it would have been longer than that. Quite a number of changes were made following the first proposal, and in terms of the consultation following it going out there have been significant changes since then.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Minister, I return to the Corrective Services issue. Could you indicate what role the Department of Corrective Services plays in supervising convicted interstate sex offenders? If the answer is none, do you think it is more appropriate that the Department of Corrective Services supervises these offenders? To give an example, Dennis Ferguson is a notorious sex offender from Queensland. Should he be the subject of supervision by the Department of Corrective Services?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Point of order: As I understand it, that would be a matter for the Attorney General to deal with in terms of the legislation that he is responsible for. I think the Hon. John Ajaka is bringing a question to a committee that is not suited to deal with the question.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: To the point of order: It is a very straightforward question. It asks the Minister for his opinion as to whether he believes the Department of Corrective Services should have some involvement in the matter. I asked the Minister firstly whether the department has any involvement in the matter. The answer is either yes or no. I then asked the Minister: If the answer is no, does he feel that the department should have an involvement? Again, the answer is either yes or no. I do not see where the problem lies.

CHAIR: I will rule on the point of order. There are always a number of issues reported on in the media that people like to ask questions about in this sorts of forums, or in the House itself. Even though questions were asked of the Attorney General about this matter earlier today, if the Minister wishes to respond, that is the Minister's choice.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: With regard to interstate supervision, the only way we would be monitoring someone from interstate is if they were completing their sentence prior to release on parole. In those circumstances, we would be monitoring someone in that situation. Apart from that, the answer is no. But it is worth noting that when Dennis Ferguson was released in Queensland, partly in response to his release Queensland passed its version of the New South Wales serious sex offenders legislation, which came into effect in June 2003. He has never been in custody serving a sentence at a time when sex offender legislation could have been used to get an order against him in New South Wales.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Minister, until August this year there were 11 escapes from New South Wales jails. Matthew Bindley has stated that he suspects that understaffing is to blame. Do you accept that a number of these escapes have been caused by understaffing? If so, what has been done to rectify the problem?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: With respect to Matt Bindley, he has a particular agenda to pursue, and it is his right to pursue it. But, as such, that is going to make him a less than credible authority on the reasons for escapes. The fact is that the Government and Corrective Services take every escape very seriously. As I think I have said previously in the House, one escape is one too many. But it is worth noting that when the Carr Government was elected escapes were running at, from memory, 136 a year and our prison population was under 5,000. There are now over 10,000 inmates in our correctional centres in New South Wales, and last year the escapes numbered 17. In the two previous years they were 10 and 10.

So it is worth noting that, whilst we take escapes seriously, there are thorough investigations conducted after every escape. I might add that currently a full security review is being conducted throughout New South Wales by former Assistant Commissioner John Klok. For those of you who do not know, former Assistant Commissioner John Klok was involved in the establishment of the high risk management unit at Goulburn, colloquially referred to as Supermax. So he is somebody who understands security in our correctional centres, and he is conducting a full review. We take these matters very, very seriously and we are looking to address it. Frankly, I am surprised that someone like you would rely on Matt Bindley as an authority when you would know, as well as I do, that he has a particular agenda that he is pursuing against the Government as a result of our decision to outsource Parklea. He is obviously going to be looking at every opportunity that is available to him to put his spin on why an escape did occur and what the reasons were.

The fact is that the premise that somehow we are winding back staff is absurd in the extreme. We have continued to increase our staffing levels to match the growth in our inmate population. We conduct full and thorough reviews of every single escape, because one escape is one too many.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: In view of the time, would you take this question on notice. Could you supply us with the details of the investigations in relation to the 11 escapes, if those investigations are completed?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Those particular matters will not be made available, simply because they contain quite sensitive information about the security systems that operate in our correctional centres and we do not want that information floating around, regarding security measures that operate within our facilities. Some make recommendations of enhancements that might be applied and those sorts of things, and I think it would be most inappropriate that those matters and those reports are available.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: You may take this on notice. Minister, can you indicate how much has been spent in the last financial year on consultants and how much it is anticipated will be spent this financial year on consultants?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: In respect of which area?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: In relation to Corrective Services?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: With respect, that is available in the annual report. I suggest you go to the annual report to find it.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, I ask you a question about pre-apprenticeship courses. How is the Government helping young people to find and secure apprenticeship places in New South Wales?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Last week I informed the House of the good news that we have reached our first year target of employing 1,00 apprentices. We have achieved this four months ahead of time. Part of the reason we have been able to reach that milestone ahead of time is because of the support this Government provides to young people to help them find and secure an apprenticeship place. This year the Government sponsored 10 pre-apprenticeship courses for young people interested in obtaining a trade qualification. The courses were rolled out statewide and focused on providing preliminary training opportunities in trade shortage areas such as mechanical engineering, carpentry and joinery, automotive services and electrical trades.

Developed in partnership with the Department of Education and Training, the courses provide great support for young people, as well as addressing the skills shortages identified in a particular region. I recently had the pleasure of attending a pre-apprenticeships graduation event at the TAFE New South Wales Illawarra Institute. The students were graduating after successfully completing one of two pre-apprenticeship courses—either automotive vehicle servicing, or metal fabrication and welding. I heard that all 24 students who enrolled in the courses at Illawarra TAFE completed the program, which is a remarkable completion rate. This is of great credit to the staff of Illawarra TAFE for the outstanding support they had provided for students. It was also a reflection of the strong commitment of each student in the program. However, I understand I did not have the opportunity to meet with every student who completed the pre-apprenticeship course at the graduation.

Sixteen-year-old Jacob Armes from Shellharbour could not attend the graduation because he was actually at a job interview with the Roads and Traffic Authority. I heard last week that Jacob got the job and begins work with the Roads and Traffic Authority, Bellambi depot, in December 2009. This is great news for Jacob, and an indication of how successful these pre-apprenticeship courses are in assisting young people find and secure employment. Students in the program, like the graduates I met in Wollongong, are now better prepared to take on and complete an apprenticeship. I note that 31 students, who completed one of the 10 pre-apprenticeship courses, have already obtained employment, and this number will rise as job placements become available towards the end of the year. Speaking from experience, I confirm that apprenticeships are a great way for young people to start their working life.

In fact, Australian research has shown that more than 90 per cent of former apprentices achieve long-term full-time employment and can potentially earn more than people who have undertaken other types of training. My congratulations go to these young apprentices for developing their skills and preparing for a better future. The community can be assured that the Government will continue to invest in jobs and training, and support young people to gain employment and lead fulfilling working lives.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: My question relates to your role as Minister for Public Sector Reform, and Special Minister of State. What is the Government doing to improve Aboriginal employment in the New South Wales public sector?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: It is an unfortunate reality that Aboriginal people continue to face disadvantage in a range of social and economic measures. This is a very complex problem, which has challenged public policy development across Australia for decades. However, all governments agree that employment is critical to providing long lasting opportunities for individuals and Aboriginal communities. That is why the Government is committed to attracting, recruiting, developing and retaining Aboriginal employees. In addition, the Government is committed to ensuring that its services, and the people delivering those services, are representative of the community they serve. Currently, Aboriginal people represent approximately 2 per cent of the New South Wales community. In 2005, Aboriginal people only represented 1.86 per cent of the total New South Wales public sector workforce. However, due to Government policies specifically targeted to improving Aboriginal employment in New South Wales, that figure has grown to 2.2 per cent exceeding the previous target of 2 per cent representation.

The Government has a plan to have even greater Aboriginal representation in the public sector. This is to implement the Government's commitment to meet its target of 2.6 per cent Aboriginal employment within the New South Wales public sector by 2015. To reach this commitment, an action plan for 2009 to 2012 to improve Aboriginal employment rates has been developed in consultation with a number of New South Wales government agencies. The action plan builds on the strategic framework of Making it Our Business launched in 2006. This framework provided practical guidance and resources to government agencies to assist in the development of effective Aboriginal employment opportunities. It is worth highlighting a number of successful strategies developed by New South Wales government agencies to support and strengthen Aboriginal employment.

The commitment of the Department of Education and Training to improve employment, professional development and participation of Aboriginal people in its workforce is demonstrated through a range of initiatives under the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan 2009-2011. Since 2004, 315 Aboriginal teachers have been permanently appointed to vacant positions. The number of scholarships available to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students to train as schoolteachers for the 2010 program has increased from 60 to at least 80 each year. Fifty-eight Aboriginal school administrative and support staff have been employed since 2006. TAFE New South Wales institutes in Western Sydney and the Hunter have supported Aboriginal students to gain certificate IV qualification in Training and Assessment. As a result, those two institutes have collectively employed 16 graduates of the program as part-time teachers.

The Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water has successfully filled a minimum of 10 Aboriginal traineeships each year since 2005. The traineeships have a very practical focus and participants undertake a role as trainee field officer during a 12-month period. At the completion of their traineeship, the trainees are offered full time employment within the parks and wildlife group. In addition, the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water also employed a further 16 Aboriginal cadet rangers in locations throughout New South Wales such as Bourke, Dubbo, Cobar, Forbes and Nowra.

The Redfern Waterloo Authority has created more than 100 jobs for Aboriginal people in a successful program run in partnership with the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union. The Department of Justice and Attorney General has successfully filled 19 Aboriginal traineeships for Sheriff's Officer positions throughout regional and rural New South Wales. These positions are based in Dubbo, Orange, Tamworth, Moree, Taree, Broken Hill and Bourke. The two-year traineeship includes the completion of a nationally recognised certificate IV in government, court compliance, with on-the-job learning and off-job training. The course is run at Charles Sturt University in Dubbo, and allows the trainees to apply for any vacant Sheriff's Officer positions when training is complete.

I have outlined just a handful of examples of action that government agencies are taking as part of the whole of government strategic framework. The results are more jobs and opportunities for Aboriginal people, which will not only support indigenous communities, but also the broader community, which benefits from a trained workforce. The Government is committed to closing the gap on indigenous disadvantage, and improving strategies to boost employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. The public sector has made considerable progress and we are continuing our efforts in recruiting and retaining a skilled and talented Aboriginal workforce.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: The Premier gave you the task of overseeing the cadetship program. How is the Government's new cadetship program working?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: As the Premier said, the Government is committed to boosting jobs for young people and it is increasing the number of entry level positions in the New South Wales public sector. In addition to the creation of 4,000 apprenticeship places, this new program commits the Government to the creation of 2,000 cadetships over the next four years in the public sector. This means that under the JumpSTART NSW Program, New South Wales government agencies will be employing 500 new cadets every year, over the next four years. JumpSTART is designed to help young people take up careers in the public sector. Under JumpSTART, successful applicants will have a cadetship in a public sector agency for 12 months followed by a permanent position if they successfully complete the program.

The pilot phase of the program is now complete, and we have made significant progress so far. We are now in the full implementation phase of the program. JumpSTART opens up a range of new job opportunities for young people who have left school recently. An experienced supervisor and workplace buddy or mentor will provide support for the cadets. This is designed to assist young people who may not have much work experience cope with the realities of the work environment, that is, understanding what is expected of them, learning about the culture of the workplace, pointing them in the right direction when they need assistance and providing a ready sounding board for the 101 questions we all have in a new job. I have a few more.

Training and development will occur through varied work experiences in the agencies and on-the-job training. This will be supplemented with formal training relevant to the occupation. This means that some cadets will work in different locations of one organisation while others will do different types of work in the one place to extend their experience and skills. The cadets training may involve a course at TAFE if a qualification is required. Otherwise they will attend short courses that provide them with the core skills for the job: customer service, computers and so on.

As part of the pilot program, 13 public sector agencies placed 74 young people in jobs across New South Wales in August this year. The agency work is wide ranging: education, community support services, environment, business services and public administration. A highly competitive recruitment process yielded a strong field of over 1,000 applicants. Candidates applied online and completed aptitude and skills tests and a telephone interview. Short-listed candidates were then referred to agency interviews. The result has been the appointment of enthusiastic and career ready young people.

Four types of cadetships were offered in the pilot intake: office administration and customer service, assistants in nursing, information technology support and farm assistants. There are 42 cadets in Sydney and 32 in regional New South Wales. In Sydney the positions are spread over the greater metropolitan area, with a majority in the central business district and western suburbs. In regional New South Wales there are ten cadets on the Central Coast, nine in the Hunter and smaller number spread across the State. As the quality of the short-listed candidates was exceptionally high, over 200 candidates will be placed on an eligibility list for the second intake starting in October this year. The date was chosen to coincide with the end of the Higher School Certificate so as not to distract students from their studies.

The Government is very proud of the JumpSTART program. We will extend the maximum age for applicants from under 21 years to under 25 years in the next recruitment round, to open up opportunities for more young people. Cadet ships are an excellent way for young people without formal training to get their foot in the door of a new career in the public sector.

CHAIR: Are young people with disabilities included in the JumpSTART program?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We have a process where we are dealing with disability employment and I am happy to answer that. In regard to JumpSTART, I will take that on notice.

CHAIR: Yes, in regard to JumpSTART?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will take that on notice.

CHAIR: That concludes the time we have for this hearing of budget estimates. I thank the Minister, Commissioner Woodham, Mr Schipp, Mr McPherson and Mr Grant for attending this afternoon. You will have 21 days to answer from the date on which the secretariat gets the questions to you that you have taken on notice

today. Committee members have two days from today's hearing to lodge any further questions on notice. Once that process is completed the Committee secretariat will contact you in relation to that as well. Once again thank you for coming in today and for the information you have provided to the Committee.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
