

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 2

Monday 12 August 2013

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES, WOMEN

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. M. A. Ficarra (Chair)

The Hon. J. Barham
The Hon. D. Clarke
The Hon. S. Cotsis
The Hon. G. J. Donnelly

The Hon. L. Foley
The Hon. J. A. Gardiner
The Hon. P. Green (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. H. Westwood

PRESENT

The Hon. Pru Goward, *Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Women*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

CHAIR: Welcome, Minister. I declare the hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2013-14 open to the public. Before I commence I acknowledge the Gadigal clan of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of this land. I also pay respect to elders past and present and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people who may be present. I welcome Minister Pru Goward and her accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Family and Community Services and Women.

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 photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee you must take responsibility for what you publish or what interpretation is placed on anything that is said before the Committee. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available on the table by the door. I note that today's hearing is open to the public and is being webcast live via the Parliament's website.

Before I commence I would like to make some comments about procedural matters. Any messages from advisers or members' staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber and support staff or the Committee clerks. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your officers seated at the table behind you. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning. Minister, the House has resolved that answers to questions on notice must be provided within 21 days. I remind everyone to please turn off their mobile phones or at least place them on silent. All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. I ask all other witnesses each in turn to state your full name, job title and agency and either swear an oath or an affirmation, the words of which are on a card in front of you.

MIKE ALLEN, Chief Executive, Housing NSW, Department of Family and Community Services,
MICHAEL COUTTS-TROTTER, Director General, Department of Family and Community Services, and
KERRY ANNE BOLAND, Children's Guardian, Office of the Children's Guardian, sworn and examined:
MAREE WALK, Chief Executive, Community Services, Department of Family and Community Services,
MAURA BOLAND, Deputy Director General, Department of Family and Community Services, and
PAUL CALLAGHAN, Chief Executive, Aboriginal Housing Office, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: The questions will be asked in 20-minute sections, starting with Opposition members, and then equally shared between the crossbench members and the Government members until 4.00 p.m. when we will deal with the portfolio of Women and follow a similar procedure. I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Family and Community Services and Women open for examination.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Good afternoon, Minister. Given that the budget papers tell us that the Community Services budget has fallen from \$1.67 billion when you came to office to \$1.49 billion this financial year—that is a \$180 million cut—does that not reveal that cost cutting comes before child protection as far as this Government is concerned?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Thank you for the question. In fact the budget for Community Services has risen this year and it has risen by more than the rate of inflation, so the premise of your question is incorrect. What you might not have identified, because I do not recall you being interested last year, was that the Brighter Futures program has transferred to the non-government sector and that of course involved the transfer of a considerable amount of money.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I ask you about community services caseworkers. Is it not the case that documents released under freedom of information reveal that the number of caseworkers on the Central Coast and in the Hunter area decreased from 326 in 2011 to 295 last year? Is that not the case, Minister?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Caseworker numbers go up and down all the time; they always have. We have not cut statutory child protection case numbers since we were elected and the number of budgeted caseworker positions has not changed. I have not instructed that there be a reduction in the number of budgeted front-line caseworker positions. These lies—and I have to say that I think they are lies—are intended obviously to frighten the public and I certainly think I have made it clear on many occasions that this is something that child protection agencies in this State have dealt with for years, in particular, the vacancy level.

In 2010, when your lot was in, the vacancy rate for funded caseworker positions was 20 per cent. That is not my figure; that is the Auditor-General's figure. The caseworker vacancy rate last year was down to 7 per cent, so there is a great deal more effort being put in to ensuring that our caseworkers are able to do the job. We have found that 50 per cent of a caseworker's time under your watch was being taken up not with children but in front of computer screens and filling in paperwork. There are now a number of reform programs in train to reduce that amount of time so that in fact caseworkers can spend more time with children. I have certainly directed my Director General to ensure that all budgeted caseworker positions are filled.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Minister, you tell us that budgeted caseworker positions have not been reduced.

Ms PRU GOWARD: What else is there?

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Actual caseworkers. Can you tell us that actual caseworkers have not been reduced?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is about the vacancy rate and I am reminding you that on your watch—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I am asking you about your watch, Minister.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And I am telling you that on my watch there was a 7 per cent vacancy rate last year and on your watch it was 20 per cent.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What is the budgeted number of caseworkers?

Ms PRU GOWARD: The budgeted number of caseworkers is about the same as it was under Labor but I will ask the Director General to answer that question.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: There are 2,068 funded caseworker positions. Then there is how effectively we as an agency—and it is an agency responsibility, it is my responsibility—translate that into front-line capacity. There are many factors that bear on that: long- and short-term leave; people being seconded into other jobs inside the agency to give effect to the Wood commission reforms; people moving to other jobs in the department or the government; and people leaving to resign or retire. What we need to provide to the Minister and through the Minister to the public is useful information about the effective front-line capacity, which is partly a budget number and is helpful but it does not tell the whole story. The real story is in two other key measures: one, how we translate that into front-line capacity; and two, what the brilliant people who do the work on the front line achieve with children and families. You need to look at money, capacity and results. That is the transparency that the Government has demanded of us as an agency and that is the transparency we are going to provide this year.

I am two weeks in the job. I am working my way through workforce data to try to understand what the effective capacity is. I am not yet confident in the numbers that I am working with so I am not prepared to offer a view to you now about that. Suffice to say it will be advice to the Minister that will be published for the community. We need to keep faith with the community we serve but we in corporate positions need to keep faith with people on the front line. I have been into community service centres in the last two weeks and they know that there is a gap between the 2,068 funded positions and the real effective effort that they are able to deploy on the front line and it is my responsibility to fix that.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: From your answer I take it there are 2,068 budgeted caseworkers. Thank you for providing that information, Mr Coutts-Trotter. Minister, would you therefore maintain what you have said on a number of occasions in recent months, that there are over 2,000 community service caseworkers in New South Wales?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is the budgeted caseworker number, yes.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: If you go to head count, which is unfortunately the way this tends to be considered, the head count is pretty much right on that figure. Head count is an imperfect measure and tells us not much at all. You could double the head count by turning every full-time job into two part-time jobs. So we do need to be more sophisticated about how we report to the community, the Government and the Parliament and we need to enable the community to have a better understanding and discussion about real capacity on the front line.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Let us probe that. Minister, is it not the case that you have received a report from Ernst and Young that tells you that the actual number of caseworkers as at March 2013 was 1,797?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I certainly have not received a report from Ernst and Young to that effect.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: You did not commission Ernst and Young on 26 April 2013 to provide a report?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I certainly did not. Ministers usually do not commission reports from Ernst and Young and other consultants. That is usually the work of the department.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Could anyone from the department advise us whether Ernst and Young was commissioned on or about 26 April to provide a report titled, "Human resources capacity calculation and reporting"?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I am advised by Ms Maree Walk that, yes, that is the case. I have seen the report. I am reading that report and other materials as part of the work the agency has been doing to try to

measure and develop reliable measures of front-line capacity. I think it is an excellent piece of work and I think it was work that was to a degree a little while coming. That is going to be one of the inputs into the work we are doing to develop this capacity figure that we then publish.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: It is an excellent piece of work. Minister, how would you react, if you have not read it, to the fact that it reports on page 21 that the actual number of caseworkers as at March 2013 was 1,797? Are you aware of that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, I am not aware of that and if I were aware of it I would respond in exactly the same way: The number of budgeted positions is the same as it was, 2,068. What we are dealing with is a question of vacancies and that is a question for the department. It is not an instruction given by any Government Minister that there be a reduction in the effort to fill vacancies. I instructed the former Director General to fill all budgeted vacancies.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Is it not the case that the Ernst and Young report states:

Overall there appears to be a shortfall of caseworkers compared with the 2,068 funded positions ... in some areas (e.g. child protection) this shortfall has increased.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Could you remind me of the date of that report? One piece of information that is useful to the Committee is that since May 176 people have been offered and accepted positions as caseworkers. Last week I was advised 56 of those people have started on duty and the rest are following. I do not doubt the numbers in the Ernst and Young report or the quality of their work. I am sure that was a fair assessment at the time but there has been a lot of work by the agency to recruit people to fill those positions.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Given what the Ernst and Young report states about the number of caseworkers in 2013, do you stand by what you said in the Legislative Assembly on 28 February? You stated:

The total number of caseworkers across the State has not changed. Indeed, the number has gone up slightly.

Ms PRU GOWARD: That was the advice I was given by the department. That is exactly right.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: You are blaming your department for misleading the Parliament?

CHAIR: Order! That was a misleading insinuation misinterpreting the Minister's reply.

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is a total misrepresentation. Unless you are suggesting that Ministers go and do a head count themselves, I am afraid they do have to rely on the advice of their department and that was the advice I was given.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Minister, you have repeatedly been quoted and said in the Parliament and to media outlets that there are more than 2,000 caseworkers and that has not changed, in fact that has gone up slightly on your watch. Does not the Ernst and Young report tell you that there were 305 fewer caseworkers in March this year than in June 2011?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As I say, I have not seen the Ernst and Young report.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I will give you a copy later.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Thank you. What I can confirm is that my advice has always been that the number of budgeted caseworker positions has not changed. There has been no instruction to the department not to fill caseworker positions and what you are referring to is a vacancy challenge. May I remind you that you had one in five caseworker positions vacant on your watch. Particularly in northern and western regions where filling caseworkers positions has always been a challenge. I do not think you could find my answer to be anything other than absolutely standard.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Indeed. You talk of western New South Wales. Is it not the case, Minister, that in March 2013 the western New South Wales region was 85 caseworkers short of what it should have had, that is 275? In fact it had only 190, Minister. Are you aware of that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am certainly aware that the western region has always been a challenging region in which to place caseworkers. Caseworkers obviously often have partners and finding employment for partners in more remote areas of New South Wales is difficult. As far as I know recruitment to western and northern regions has always been difficult. We are addressing some proposals to find ways of appointing people or ensuring that those vacancies in those hard-to-fill regions are filled. I remind you that this was a similar problem for the previous administration.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Have you had any discussions with Ernst and Young as it has prepared this report?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will leave that to the Director General because this is obviously—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I am asking you, Minister. Have you personally had any discussions with Ernst and Young?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, because I did not commission the report.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: So you did not have any discussions.

Ms PRU GOWARD: No.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Why does it state on page 32 of the report under "Consultation with key stakeholders" that the Minister was one of the people consulted?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I have no idea, but I have never—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Are they lying?

CHAIR: That is very provocative.

Ms PRU GOWARD: They have obviously made a mistake. I have not had a briefing or a discussion with Ernst and Young since March this year.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: On page 30 of the report Ernst and Young refers to the "on-the-ground strength" of caseworkers available to do casework. The report states, "This is the best measure of frontline strength." That section states that the frontline strength on 30 June 2011 was 1,923 and on 31 March this year it was 1,617. That is a 16 per cent reduction in frontline strength on your watch, is it not?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As I have said, many of them were Brighter Futures caseworker positions that were transferred—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: That figure was 117, was it not?

Ms PRU GOWARD: On the recommendation of Justice James Wood they were transferred to the non-government sector.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Mr Coutts-Trotter, the Brighter Futures number was 117, was it not?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: From recollection, yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I am talking about a reduction of 305. Minister, you can explain 117 of them, but that still leaves a couple of hundred fewer caseworkers on your watch.

Ms PRU GOWARD: You keep forgetting that the budgeted number of 2,068 has not changed.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: But you simply do not fulfil the budget and the caseworkers are not on the ground.

CHAIR: The member has asked a question and I will allow the Minister or her advisers to answer it without constant interruption.

Ms PRU GOWARD: The Government has provided sufficient funding for 2,068 caseworker positions. That is the budgeted number and it is the department's responsibility to fill those positions.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: So it is none of your business whether there are actual caseworkers on the ground.

Ms PRU GOWARD: As I said, I instructed the previous director general to fill all vacancies. I must admit that that was after some very frustrating months talking to frontline caseworkers who kept saying that they felt there were vacancies. I kept asking questions and eventually I issued a formal instruction.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: You told the Parliament on 28 February that the number of caseworkers had increased, but Ernst and Young tell us that the number of caseworkers fell by 305. You misled the Parliament, did you not?

Ms PRU GOWARD: There was a period during which the number went up slightly. Of course, these numbers change over time. However, there was a time when there was a slight increase.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: For the first time this year we will be publishing capacity and results at an important and appropriate level of detail. That enables our frontline staff to hold people like me accountable and it enables the community to hold the agency accountable. It is a major and unprecedented exercise in transparency. It needs to happen as a package. The Ernst and Young report is one piece of work. The tasks for us—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: It is a devastating piece of work. It explains why 44,000 children reported to the Department of Community Services last financial year were not seen by a caseworker—that is, there were 305 fewer caseworkers in the first two years of your administration.

CHAIR: That is a provocative assumption.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: With respect, I am entitled to put provocative assumptions.

CHAIR: If you are going to be provocative you should allow the Minister to answer.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Mr Foley should know that last year we saw 4,150 more children than Labor did when it was in government.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: But the number you did not see to blew out to 44,000. I am referring to your own report, which tells you that there are 305 fewer caseworkers on your watch. That is a massive contributing factor in explaining why 44,000 children who were reported to your department were not seen. Is that not true?

Ms PRU GOWARD: In 2010 more children were not seen on your watch. On your watch only one in five children were being seen. You can act as indignantly and hysterically as you think the cameras want you to, but the truth is that on your watch one in five children were seen, which means that four in five were not.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Why have you maintained the lie for months that there are more than 2,000 caseworkers when Ernst and Young tell us that the frontline strength went down to 1,617?

Ms PRU GOWARD: So you are no longer interested in how many children were seen because you do not like that answer. The real answer—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I am interested in the 44,000 children who were not seen because there were 305 fewer caseworkers on your watch as at 28 March.

CHAIR: Speaking over the Minister will not generate good headlines either. The member should ask his question and listen to the answer.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I will not take my media advice from you, Marie.

CHAIR: It is a poor look.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I directed the director general to fill all vacant caseworker positions. In the meantime, through a series of very good innovations we have managed to ensure that more children are being seen—in fact, one in four—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: With 305 fewer caseworkers?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The Ernst and Young work involves an analysis that is being done for the first time. It is an attempt for the first time to get beyond headcounts and budget funding levels. It is an attempt to honestly and openly describe—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Indeed, and it is hugely revealing.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: —the capacity available on the front line. Everything must be done for the first time. This work is being done for the first time to publish for the first time. It is necessary and essential work if Maree Walk, other colleagues and I are to support people on the front line by giving them the colleagues, supports and systems they need to do an even better job.

Ms PRU GOWARD: This discussion began with a reference to vacancy rates. In 2010 there were 497 missing caseworkers on your watch. If you do not think about the vacancy rate and consider how many people were actually doing the job—and there were fewer doing the job on your watch because 497 people were away—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: With respect, Minister, the Ernst and Young report tells you something very different. It tells you that there were 305 fewer caseworkers after two years of your being Minister for Community Services. How do you respond to that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: The budgeted caseworker number is the same. We know that on your watch 497 caseworker positions were unfilled as at 30 June 2010. You have to take account of the vacancy rate and we have improved it.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: But the number of actual caseworkers has reduced to 1,617. [*Time expired.*]

Ms PRU GOWARD: The director has made the point very well.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: How much have you allocated in this year's budget for caseworkers involved in protecting children from domestic violence?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will ask the Chief Executive Officer of Community Services to answer that question.

Ms WALK: The figure is essentially the same as it has been in previous years. There is a slight increase. The budget in 2012-13 is \$199.585 million, which is roughly the same as it has been for the past couple of years.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: And that covers the 2,068 positions?

Ms WALK: That is correct.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Mr Coutts-Trotter said that they are full-time positions. How many part-time officers are doing that work?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I do not have that figure with me.

CHAIR: Can you take that question on notice?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes. The Wood reforms required a significant reorganisation of effort within the agency. There are many people with brilliant frontline experience who are helping to implement these

reforms. Our task now is to release as many of those people back to permanent frontline positions as possible and to reduce temporary appointments to community service centres to an absolute minimum. The Government's policy direction to transfer the large task of out-of-home care support to the non-government sector and to resource it better means that we are now competing with non-government employers to capture the very best people doing casework. If a non-government employer can offer a permanent position right now with a really clear career then we have to match that by being able to make the same kind of offer for the brilliant statutory child protection work we do—in other words, as much permanency, as much clarity and as much support as we can possibly achieve.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: We see this in policing, where we have actual numbers and authorised numbers. The authorised numbers do not meet the experience we need on the front line through actual numbers. So in those cases the authorised number, I gather, is 2,068. What is the actual number on the front line?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The number is short of that, as we have just discussed. The Government is going to publish this later in the year. The Ernst and Young work that Mr Foley was referring to, and a whole lot of other work inside the agency, is trying to capture with precision the real, effective effort available on the front line. So when we publish it, and our colleagues on the front line look around the community service centre, it makes sense to them. They know these two things correlate. It is really important.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: How many clients do you have that you need to address across New South Wales?

Ms WALK: Michael talked about three things earlier. He talked about how much funding is available for caseworkers. We are just focused on caseworkers at the moment. We are not talking about the practice stream, which consists of our legal officers, our psychologists and our child protection specialists. And we are not talking about the management stream, which are the casework managers and the other group of people who obviously maintain front-line strengths. So, first, it is about the money for our caseworkers. Secondly, it is about recruiting and sustaining them. Michael just outlined some of the difficulties for the whole workforce now, not just child protection and community service caseworkers but for the whole workforce—the child and family workforce. There are a lot more options available for people there now. Thirdly, it is about what we do—how those staff help children be safer. Let me talk about the last bit first, which I think is where you are going. You were asking about what we have actually been achieving in the last 12 months. People are—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: No, the line I am trying to go down is in relation to how many children we have out there who are not being cared for. What do we need to do to fix up the mess? There is a big hole in how many childcare caseworkers we need to train up and get out there for the sake of our kids.

Ms WALK: This last financial year we knocked on people's doors approximately 28,000 times and did assessments involving about 17,500 children. That does not tell you how many children are being case managed, either by our staff or in conjunction with other people. Nor does it tell you how many children are in out-of-home care and are being case managed by our own staff. It does not tell you about the 2,500 children that we have transferred from the Department of Family and Community Services to be case managed, now, by the non-government agencies involved. I would love to give you a figure and say that there are X amount of children being case managed by our child protection caseworkers.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I think everyone agrees that we need to be doing more. My question is: What do you need, Minister, to fill this gap and resolve the big issues? It is becoming obvious that you do not have enough caseworkers to look after the kids and to get the results that we need. You said that the budget is sufficient for 2,068 caseworkers. If that is not sufficient how many caseworkers do we need? Can you tell me how many caseworkers we need?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have introduced, as Maree has said, a number of practice reforms, which we think will improve the effort of our caseworkers. I do not think, until we have implemented those reforms across New South Wales—I am thinking particularly about Practice First—that it is possible to tell you how many extra caseworkers, if any, we need. As Maree has said, we now see 27 per cent of children who have reached the level of "risk of significant harm". It needs to be remembered that some of those reports are of children who are already being seen. So in that sense they are not new cases that are unknown to us.

There is also occasionally a vexatious report to do with a Family Court case. So I think, as the Director General has said on a number of occasions, it is important to get the data collection right and to know what we

are talking about before we draw any conclusions about the effort that is required. I think that is probably the best answer I can give at this stage until those reforms that we have implemented—and the reform package that will come before the Parliament by the end of the year—are given a chance to work.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: One of the comments was that it is hard to fill these positions. Why is it so hard? Is it because of a lack of education—a lack of people coming out with the appropriate training? Why is it so hard to fill them?

Ms WALK: Michael might have said earlier that we have 176 new staff who are being offered—and who have accepted—placements to work.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Only 46 of those have been implemented at this point of time.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: They are on duty at this point in time.

Ms WALK: Thirty of them are in the western area but they have not all started yet. Your question was: What will attract more caseworkers to Community Services. There is not just one answer. Obviously, our work needs to be satisfying. Some of the changes that we have made in the last 12 months around what we call Practice First means that we have seen a much more engaged and much more stimulated group of workers. Secondly, we need to ask: How do we make the staff that are there feel that what they are doing is relevant to helping families change, as opposed to sitting there and entering things into computers or doing other things that do not match their qualifications? Thirdly, we need to ask: How do we have a diverse workforce and have the right people in the right place? It is obviously not difficult for us to recruit staff in the metro area but it becomes much more difficult in some rural and regional areas.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: It is a challenge for a range of government agencies trying to provide consistent services, in western New South Wales particularly. I think we need to try and learn some of the lessons from public education, particularly. Public schools manage, with consistency, to ensure that there is a qualified teacher in classrooms in Wilcannia and Menindee, and there are a range of initiatives that they deploy to help make that happen. One of them is to get people who have lived in the bush and worked in the bush to come and talk to university graduates and challenge some of the notions that they have about what it is like to work in those communities.

If you take people to the communities they are welcomed by the communities, so they get a sense that they are going to participate in a small community and that their contributions are going to be valued. Those can be powerful motivators to get people there. So it is partly about pay and conditions but it is also about being really thoughtful about the people you select and the preparation that you give to enable them to make a success of the job when they get there.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I acknowledge that it is probably one of the hardest jobs in the world, but I understand that it is very rewarding as well, because of the victories. We do not want to leave the kids in a situation where they are exposed, as we have seen in some cases. If the processes, finances or resources need to be addressed we need to address them, for the good of the kids. [*Time expired.*]

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I can give you one example that illustrates the complexity of it and also the simple things we can do to make it better. When I was in Mount Druitt I was talking to a caseworker of seven years standing. The local Children's Court is Parramatta Children's Court. When he has an affidavit he drives it from Mount Druitt to Parramatta, taking an experienced caseworker away from families for the best part of a day. I thought, "Why is that, and what can we do rapidly to change that?" It is about getting the right people to work and providing them with the right supports. It is also about empowering them to work out how they should operate at a local level in ways that free up caseworkers to spend time with children and families and maybe hire a clerk grade 1-2 to drive affidavits to Parramatta if they need to be driven. There is that sort of subtlety.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I will follow up on some of those commitments you have given to produce information. Will you also be providing information about regional numbers in terms of caseworkers—where they are and where they are needed? I imagine that that information is available, considering the historical need and whether those numbers are fixed. I was particular worried when I heard that the North Coast had lost 20 caseworkers in the last 18 months. There is nowhere that those numbers are clearly defined, to enable monitoring.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Part of what sits behind your question is how do we assess where demand is, and patterns of demand change over time. We are in the process of moving to a new local structure that sees us organised in 15 districts that exactly match local health districts, which is a very, very good and sensible thing to do.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: That would be very much welcomed.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes, indeed, and at the same time we are developing a model that enables us to transparently, both for the community and for our staff, assess demand on a district basis, and that will change over time, and be able to allocate resources—people, time and effort—between districts over time as demand changes. The first thing we need to do is to ensure that our front-line casework managers understand how we are planning to approach measuring demand and therefore allocating resources, because it means resources will move from where they are at the moment. That is the work we need to do before we can put that model in place. But that should greatly improve our ability to direct the very best people to where they are most needed.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I do not have the Ernst and Young report so I do not have the luxury of that information.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I will get it to you, Jan.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Thank you. My interest is whether or not the Government is willing to produce this information to be absolutely transparent so next year we are very clear about the process. Similarly, in terms of the risk of significant harm reports I note that the Minister has said that the information has not been available in a format that allows you to know whether they are new reports, whether they are vexatious reports, whether those children are already in care. Are we going to see a new structure so that we can have good monitoring and reporting?

Ms WALK: The Minister has asked us to find a way to transparently report and clearly we want to report around demand. So that would be risk of significant harm, we want a report around effort—our caseworker effort—and also other funded services effort and we also want to report on outcome, how we are actually going. So it is not lots of re-reports and things like that so that we are doing what our role is, which is to help make children safe. The measures around what performance might look like are obviously quite tricky but that is what we are working on. We have commissioned a lot of work around this. Obviously in April there was the Ernst and Young report but, as we said, that was in April and we have certainly internally worked hard and gathered an extraordinary amount of data around this. We want to be able to meet the interest around this; we really want to do that.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: That will be met if the figures are made available, then everyone is clear about the figures and there is no more blame game or "he said, she said". The figures are there and the dollars are there and we know where it is going.

Ms WALK: The most important people to know this information are our managers—the people who are trying to get it right, so they know when to recruit, when not to, when to allow leave to take place, when to allow a secondment to take place. They are the people who really need this information.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Good management techniques?

Ms WALK: Yes, and that is why we want to ensure that the information does not fall off the back of a truck but that we have the opportunity to be able to talk directly with our managers about how they manage their workforce.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Do we know when we might be able to see that information, how will it come forward? You mentioned earlier, Minister, that there might be legislation.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We are talking about more child protection reforms and there will be legislation, I trust, towards the end of the year. But the transparency and the reporting of numbers will be by the end of this year.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: In relation to the budget, can you clarify issues around early intervention and what appears to be a decrease of \$16.4 million in the budget? Can you give an explanation as to why when your child protection paper clearly identified that it is an important area we do not see it in the dollars made available? Is that able to be explained?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes. A lot of this is due to the over-representation of corporate overheads in this group, so the service group always carries a disproportionate high share of corporate overheads—about \$13 million. It was 5 per cent in 2012-13 and we have taken it to 1.7 per cent in 2013, which we think more realistically represents this group's share of corporate overheads. The reduction does also include the cessation of the charitable goods scheme and the transport scheme, which I think people would acknowledge was a very nice World War II scheme but is certainly not something that is aligned anymore with the priorities of Family and Community Services [FACS], which is to keep children and young people from the risk of significant harm.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Is there still scope in the budget to see an increase in real services in terms of early intervention? If you are reducing your costs, what about actual service provision?

Ms WALK: One of the significant investments in this area this year is the Brighter Futures Youth Hope program that is in four areas. That is \$10 million a year, \$40 million over four years. That is an area that was a Wood recommendation that took some time to get right. We consulted with the sector and they were very clear they did not want that spread across; they wanted a couple of services that could really do the work. I have to say I am delighted that we have got for the first time in Australia, I think, the Milwaukee wraparound service to test that out. That is one of the biggest new investments in that area in particular.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: That is \$10 million?

Ms WALK: That is \$10 million per annum; \$40 million over four years.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Metro south west has got UnitingCare as a service provider, and that is \$1.8 million. The metro west area has Wesley, and that is \$3.5 million; the Hunter and the Central Coast has Allambi Youth Services—a wonderful service—\$2.2 million; northern has Tamworth Family Support Services, that is \$787,000; and western we are still seeking a provider but they have been allocated about \$1.4 million.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Is there an allocation for the North Coast in that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is in the northern region.

Ms WALK: We went where the demand was in terms of the data and, as I was saying, the consultations we had with people, rather than try and spread this amount and every area get an amount—

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: The Lismore-Ballina-Byron-Tweed area did not constitute a great demand?

Ms WALK: No, their demand was less than the other areas in that—

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Is that because there are other services that are operating there?

Ms WALK: Let me take that on notice as to how we did the resource allocation and how we did that.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Can I ask about the response to the Ombudsman's Aboriginal sexual assault against children report? Minister Dominello said this morning that the carriage is with you to respond.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We are still formalising an all-of-government response. We advised the Ombudsman that we wanted to give it a little bit more time because we were very conscious of the failures of the past. If you recall, the Ombudsman's report is a review of a report of a review; it was a commentary on the previous efforts, which the Ombudsman concluded had barely made any difference despite—

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I think he used the word "failed".

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, failed—I am glad that we can agree on that. So we wanted to do that better.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: So there is no budget allocation to deal with that this year but it might mean that when you respond there is the potential for further budget across agencies?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes. I think you will see that it will be an all-of-government response to that, as indeed it should be.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Can you clarify how many Indigenous children are currently in out-of-home care? I also wanted to ask about the issue of \$37,000 for out-of-home care.

Ms WALK: The unit price?

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: The unit price, whether or not it is meeting the test of appropriately dealing with the cost of out-of-home care.

Ms WALK: In relation to the agencies we are transitioning to, with the 2,350 children that were transitioned in the previous year, we have now more out-of-home care agencies being accredited and applying to be accredited. We do not have any indication that that figure is not able to meet their needs.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: You are not receiving reports from non-government organisations that are currently working under that a feeling that it is not meeting the need?

Ms WALK: I have to say—

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will take that on notice. [*Time expired.*]

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Following up on the reference earlier to the proposed reforms to the child protection system and particularly those outlined in the child protection discussion paper, can the Committee be informed on how those reforms will be designed to improve services for and the lives of vulnerable children and young people at risk?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Thank you for your question and your interest in child protection reforms. We are obviously keen to embark on some significant additional reforms to the New South Wales child protection system that I think reflect a dynamic shift in thinking and have been very well responded to by the community. I will ask the chief executive, Ms Walk, to explain exactly how those reforms are intended to improve services and lives.

Ms WALK: You will allow me if I stray from the legislative reforms and the policy and practice issues that spring from some of those that we are doing at the same time. We are delivering on three main areas. One is around building the capacity of vulnerable parents to be able to care for their children and help them stay accountable around their parental obligations. Secondly, we are looking at providing all children and young people in out-of-home care with a safe and stable home early to ensure that they do not fall into a series of temporary placements that result in instability, uncertainty and ultimately leading to poor life outcomes because children simply do not feel that they belong. Thirdly, the other arch of reforms is creating a truly child-focused system that places the best interests of children and young people at the heart of it.

With the first raft of reforms, we have introduced both parental capacity orders and parental responsibility agreements. These tools help us essentially keep parents at the table. They get what we call change you can see. They enable both our workforce and non-government caseworkers to ensure that parents are engaged in programs to get back on track and, indeed, stay engaged. It is not uncommon, unfortunately, when we have child deaths or things like that, when we look back the parent has been engaged for a short time in a program and has just moved away, and the intensity or enduring nature of those programs has not been strong enough to be able to get the change. So we are using parental capacity orders and parental responsibility agreements to ensure that we have a mechanism to keep the parents at the table.

Another is greater use of family group conferencing. I think in our discussion papers we had the most resounding support for family group conferencing. I heard the head of the Children's Court the other day say that he also intends to utilise the part in the Act about making our court less adversarial, and family group conferencing will go a long way towards that. It is also part of a practice change as well. It is a mechanism to bring the families to the table and find out who in the family can help them change in order to make children safe. If we are not able to keep kids safe at home the family group conference also tells us who else the children

might be able to live with so that we are less reliant on care outside the home and we have harnessed the family system in order to keep children safe if they are unable to live at home.

The second raft of reforms builds from that as well and is about providing better life outcomes for children who unfortunately cannot live at home and be safe. We have established a hierarchy of permanency that puts either preserving families, restoring families or looking at kin for support if children cannot live at home with kin. Then if children are unable to live at home or live with kin, we consider open adoption. Obviously for some cultural groups, particularly Aboriginal people, this is not what you would use. You would use other mechanisms of enduring guardianship that we are proposing, but we allow children the opportunity to have a home for life and the court can at least consider that opportunity rather than children bouncing from one foster care home to another. That is the other option we are putting inside the hierarchy.

We are also mandating restoration time frames so that we ensure that the clock that is ticking for the child is the one we pay attention to, not the clock that is ticking for the adults in the circumstances. So the restoration time frames are important. We are also looking at long-term guardianship orders. That is where we are looking closely at how to give the kin, grandparents and other people much more certainty about their care so that they can get on and support the children and have a sense of a long-term nature of that. In order to support our key reforms we obviously need a much more flexible and less legalistic system. As I said, I know that is something that the Children's Court judge is also keen on. There are some things that we have there as well about strengthening provisions that minimise the misuse of social media.

Clearly, as an organisation we have raised the issue about caseworkers. We have a lot of concern where sometimes there are mischievous things said about our caseworkers, making their job very hard to do when they are vilified on social media. We also have concerns about children who are under the care of the Minister and others being used in social media as well. The issue we have been championing is increasing transparency about child deaths. Child deaths are never linear. There is not one incident which causes a child's death but the learnings that can take place about a series of lost opportunities are things that we think the whole community, particularly the professional community, are interested in and that is ensuring that we address that issue. I have probably gone on somewhat too much on that one. I could talk all day on that but clearly for us it is the legislation but also the policy and practice changes that are critical in terms of getting better outcomes for kids.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: How will the Government's reforms to strengthen the Working With Children Check better protect children?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Thank you for this important question, particularly as we develop partnerships with a whole range of non-government organisations. We recognise the importance of ensuring that the people who we trust to work with children are the right kind of people. It is what the public expects both of public sector and non-government employees. The Office of the Children's Guardian, along with a number of government departments, contributed to deliver a simpler but significantly more advanced employment screening regime that will improve the checking process for workers and employers, and most importantly provide an enhanced level of protection for children. I will ask the Children's Guardian, Kerryn Boland, to outline in more detail what those changes actually mean.

Ms K. BOLAND: By way of general summary, there are four key improvements to the new Working With Children Check that ultimately provide greater protection to children in New South Wales. The first is that it is the same Working With Children Check regardless of your status, whether you are a paid employer, self-employed or a volunteer. You may recall that before there were different tiers, different systems that operated in relation to different categories. This Working With Children Check says that one system operates for all of those categories of workers. The second thing is that it assesses full criminal histories. The full criminal record history of each applicant is assessed; certain records are seen to be either prohibitive and result in a bar and others are seen as triggers which trigger a risk assessment. That is the third change.

The most significant change is that the system is much easier to operate. A fundamental change is that the check now belongs to the employee. It is not the responsibility of the employer to apply for checks with the Children's Guardian. That is a matter for the employee. This means that the check is portable and operates for five years. A Working With Children Check clearance will allow someone to work for five years in any child-related work. Obviously that is a huge decrease in red tape for employers and has ease for employees.

The most significant change, I think, has been an interface and collaboration between a number of government departments—Federal and State. It is paperless and fully electronic. It has resulted in Working with

Children checks clearances being completed within two to 24 hours provided there is no criminal record to review and about 70 per cent of workers are being cleared in that time. That is an amazing increase in the number of clearances. Sometimes those clearances would take up to 48 hours or longer, depending on demands on various systems. If you like I can give us some up-to-date statistics as of today. We have been operating since 15 June 2013 and after eight weeks of operation 97,743 applications have been made on-line. Those applicants are given an application number and then they must make their way to a Roads and Maritime Services centre and verify their identity. Once that is done the information will go down to Crimcheck and an immediate clearance can be issued.

As of today 55,617 clearances have been issued. What would explain the gap is that some people have not yet made their way to Roads and Maritime Services and they are waiting, and the other proportion are being looked at by our records review officers. It is really important to understand that this system is probably the most progressive and innovative across Australia. You will know that the royal commission is now looking at a national system and looking at other States. We would support a systemic approach, a similar system across all States, obviously because the safety of children is paramount and if a person is barred in one State, we would want them to be barred in another State. That is what we are working towards.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Minister, would you update the Committee on the progress of the transfer of out-of-home care services to the non-government sector?

Ms PRU GOWARD: The Government is certainly delivering on the commitment to transfer out-of-home care to the non-government sector, as Justice Wood recommended, and I am very pleased with the progress over the past 12 months. The transfer is creating a true partnership between the non-government organisations and government. It is a partnership that Labor spoke about, as we recall, and certainly did not deliver. I think the Opposition based its opposition to the transfer on the fact that they were private operators where, in fact, we saw people like the Salvation Army and the Samaritans as great non-government organisations and to call them "private operators" is something of an insult.

We are absolutely confident that the transfer will improve lives for children and young people in care. We know that the union bosses were opponents of that because they were not so concerned about the quality of life for children. It was not their responsibility but it does allow us to focus on our core responsibility which is statutory child protection, just as Justice Wood said it should be. But I think one of the wonderful benefits of the transfer is that it will improve the lives of those children in non-government organisations. As I have moved around the State and met non-government organisations, their carers, including Aboriginal carers who are now with great non-government organisations, and the children the consistent message is how much better it is working for them and how much more support they now get from the non-government organisation. I will now invite Marie Walk to give you a little more detail on the numbers.

Ms WALK: Our reforms in out-of-home care, of course, have the goal that children and young people in out-of-home care have a better future. The major activity we are doing to achieve that is transferring out-of-home care service delivery to the non-government sector. At approximately June last year we had transferred about 123 children and I am delighted to say that we have met the target of transferring 2,183 children. As at the end of July we transferred 2,474 children and young people to non-government providers. This is an extraordinary effort, I have to say, by Community Services staff, non-government organisations, the peak organisations and, of course, our carers. We are especially pleased at the work of the Aboriginal secretariat, AbSec, and the Aboriginal agencies who have become accredited out-of-home care agencies this year and those who are working towards accreditation. Shortly I will ask Karen Boland to talk a little about those agencies.

In the coming year our reform here will continue to focus on the system, especially new entries into out-of-home care. How can we build a system where only those children who really need to come into care are placed and when they are placed they are placed with non-government agencies? Community Services itself has also been engaged in the process of being accredited as an out-of-home care provider to ensure that the standards where children are placed are met within us as well. I ask Kerry Boland whether she has anything to add about the Aboriginal agencies, because developing an Aboriginal workforce and non-government Aboriginal agencies is quite ground breaking and has received national media attention. I know many of our AbSec agencies and others are asked to talk about this throughout the country.

Ms K. BOLAND: I will commence by saying that the New South Wales out-of-home care regulation against standards is probably leading national practice. It has been looked at and is comprehensively being looked at by a couple of other States at the moment to replicate. This system has been in operation under the

watch of my office, the Office of the Children's Guardian. During this transition period we have been very busy obviously accrediting new providers. To give a bit of an overview, I can tell you that we have 67 non-government service providers on a pre-qualified list kept by Community Services and it will draw on those for the future. Sixty-one of those service providers have been accredited or provisionally accredited by my office and 50 of the 67 providers have been contracted by Community Services to provide out-of-home care placements. This includes 18 new service providers.

It is important to understand in New South Wales you actually cannot provide out-of-home care unless you meet certain standards that are set out in the NSW Standards for Statutory Out-of-Home Care. We have been particularly successful, as Ms Walk mentioned, in relation to Aboriginal out-of-home care agencies. This has been a long-term commitment from my office and Community Services and AbSec. We have worked together over time to build the capacity in the Aboriginal sector. Now we have 10 Aboriginal agencies being accredited by my office. They can arrange statutory and supported out-of-home care. Four of those agencies are provisionally accredited. Under the current system you can set up and be provisionally accredited with your policies and procedures for a three-year period. Once you receive children in your care then we monitor those placements over the three-year period. At the end of that three-year period you can gain a full accreditation. We have also been very fortunate in having another seven Aboriginal agencies currently applying for accreditation. This is one of the success stories of the out-of-home care standards regime.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Minister, what measures have been taken to improve transparency and accountability across Family and Community Services in the past 2½ years?

Ms PRU GOWARD: In opposition we committed to increase transparency and accountability because they drive reform. We now publish child death annual reports which analyse the deaths of children known to Community Services and, in particular—and this is what is unique about these reports—looks at how Community Services as a department can improve services and lives and how it learns from these deaths, which I might note Labor never did.

We now publish information about social housing waiting lists and waiting times so that applicants can make better decisions. They know that if they want a house in Blacktown they might have to wait over a decade. Labor never did this but I think it is important for people who want to be part of the social housing system to get a fair indication of how long they might have to wait.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The Hon. Helen Westwood will now ask questions.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I thank you, Minister, and your advisers for attending today. Could you inform the Committee of the number of open cases the Cabramatta and Kings Cross street teams have at the time you closed those teams?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I just make a comment on an earlier question? I make it very clear that I have not misled Parliament on the subject of caseworker numbers. I have repeatedly said that numbers change and that they go up and down. That is the advice that I have at all stages been given. When we are able to transparently publish the data, it will be beyond political game playing, but I just wanted to make that statement. The Cabramatta youth team service has not been closed. When we came to office there were two youth teams, one in Cabramatta and one at Kings Cross, servicing essentially two suburbs.

We felt, particularly when we looked at the very small number of children—young people, teenagers—that those two teams were dealing with, that it was important to expand the crisis youth response teams across the State and when you look, for example, at Bankstown or even Epping, the Epping Community Services Centre was receiving more at risk of significant harm reports about adolescents than the Cabramatta youth street team. With that in mind we have expanded the service around New South Wales and we now have the south-west youth team, which takes in the Cabramatta area but Cabramatta in a year only saw 74 young teenagers whereas Epping was hundreds; Bankstown and Liverpool were also hundreds each, so was important to ensure that all teenagers in New South Wales, not just a very few in two suburbs, were able to receive support when they needed it.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Is that the adolescent team? Is that what you are calling it?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: How many caseworkers do you have at that team?

Ms PRU GOWARD: More, as we announced at the time.

Ms WALK: Perhaps if I can talk about two things. I do want to talk about the difficulties that occurred on the weekend with this young woman and I want to say a number of things about that before I respond directly about the street team. Ever since in 1947 when we started doing research into children's deaths, one of the things we have learnt and tried to teach child protection staff and indeed the general community is that it is very unlikely that there is a causal relationship between one particular incident and the child death. It has been a kind of matter of faith almost and is what every piece of evidence tells you, what every child death report tells us from 1947 in the United Kingdom onwards. Certainly when I was a child protection worker that is what we have always learnt and it is what Professor Eileen Munro, who is seen as an international expert, would say.

It was with a heavy heart that I heard some of the comments that were made in the media where a particular incident or a particularly initiative was drawn directly to, in this case, a young woman's suicide. Having said that, there is a sense of "if only" for all our staff and indeed for the whole community. I understand because I spoke to the Catholic Care staff who were working and supporting this woman and had been involved with her since April by providing her casework support. I understand that the whole team had been going through that "if only" kind of experience themselves and I can understand that some of our staff who had worked with the Cabramatta street team may experience that.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Ms Walk, could I just—

Ms WALK: Let me now come to the Cabramatta street team—sorry, but I did feel that it was important that we unhook and uncouple any suggestion—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Okay. Our time is limited so if you could just answer my question: How many caseworkers now are on that adolescent team?

Ms WALK: The Cabramatta street team closed on 30 June. The Cabramatta street team manager casework moved to become the child protection adolescent response team manager casework position. There are two casework staff who took other similar positions in the metropolitan IST, which is an intensive support team. Two casework staff returned to their permanent positions at Fairfield Community Services Centre. All clients of the Cabramatta street team had been supported to transition to other non-government agencies and services as the majority were not at risk of significant harm. Twelve cases required absorbing, seven matters—that is five kids who were in out-of-home care and two child protection cases—went to Fairfield Community Services Centre and five other matters were absorbed by the metropolitan south-west child protection adolescent response team.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: So that is seven cases that were reallocated?

Ms WALK: No, I said two things. Seven matters went to Fairfield Community Services Centre, so they were obviously in that jurisdiction, that is the geographic area they were closest to, and five matters were absorbed by the whole of the metropolitan south-west child protection, including one court matter. In terms of how many in the whole of the State—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: So that was 12 out of how many cases that they had?

Ms WALK: We would obviously only allocate active cases. We do not allocate cases that we do not have to allocate. I am a little unclear of the question?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You are saying that there were how many cases overall that were active?

Ms WALK: I am saying 12 cases required absorbing.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Overall?

Ms WALK: That is right.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And the total number of caseworkers in adolescent risk services has increased from 16 to 60.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: The adolescent team that now covers the south-west covers from Bowral to Bankstown, is that correct?

Ms WALK: It would cover the whole of the south-west area.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: How many workers are allocated for that? Is that 16? Is that what you are saying?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, the 16 was for Kings Cross and Cabramatta.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: How many caseworkers do we have now in the adolescent team who have responsibility for the south-west area?

Ms WALK: I do not have that figure on me so let me take that on notice.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You do not know? Okay.

Ms WALK: You are talking about adolescent child protection workers employed by Community Services in the south-west area?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Yes.

Ms WALK: We will take that on notice.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You do not know how many there are?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Well, we do know.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Well, you cannot tell me. I just asked you.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Because we do not bring all the papers in with us and we will get you that answer.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I do not think that is too hard a question given the tragedy.

CHAIR: The Minister has indicated it is on notice.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We will take it on notice, which is perfectly reasonable.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You referred to the very tragic case of the child who was found dead last Friday at the youth refuge. Could you tell me if her file was reallocated to a community service centre?

Ms WALK: What I can tell you is that from April on she had been case managed by—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: By Community Services?

Ms WALK: By Catholic Care.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: By a non-government organisation.

Ms WALK: Yes, by Catholic Care.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Was she referred by—

Ms WALK: And I understand that in June when we were closing the team Community Services was going to transfer it to Fairfield Community Services Centre but as she had not worked with our agency for many

months and was receiving 24-hour case management support from Catholic Care, it was deemed the agency that the girl had decided to work with. Unfortunately young people often vote with their feet a little bit.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: So your department did not reallocate the case to any service?

Ms WALK: No, she was already being case managed by Catholic Care.

Ms PRU GOWARD: What could be a greater service than 24 hours a day seven days a week?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: With due respect, Minister, she did not have 24-hours care. No-one believes that, given that the child was found dead. That is absolutely unbelievable.

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is outrageous.

CHAIR: That is a very misleading, provocative statement.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: No, it is not.

CHAIR: I am sorry; I am not going to allow that sort of emotional line of questioning.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You would not want the truth. You do not want to hear the truth.

CHAIR: I am not going to allow that sort of emotional line of questioning when it involves the death of a young person. Could we show respect?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: She could not have been supervised for 24 hours if she was found dead at a refuge.

CHAIR: Please can we show respect? Ask a respectful question and we can get the answer. We are all concerned.

Ms WALK: Can I just be a little clearer. It is a little inaccurate to call the Catholic Care hostel where she was staying a youth refuge. They were providing case management support, what they call casework support. They are funded by Juvenile Justice to be able to do that.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: So it is a Juvenile Justice service?

Ms WALK: They had found that she had made strong links with them and they had been able to work very closely with her. In fact, I spent most of my Saturday talking with the manager of CatholicCare about how she was going to debrief the staff who had worked with her, not drop-in drop-out but the person who had gone into her room on the Friday morning. I will be really clear: any person who works in this area will say you cannot compare a street team to 24-hour support. They are completely incomparable. I understand—

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Point of order—

Ms WALK: —how it feels for both the staff who work in that service and for our staff in the Cabramatta Street Team.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: It is tragic.

CHAIR: It is very traumatic.

Ms WALK: It is some months since they had worked with her and it was minutes before the staff had been engaging with this girl. They were engaging with her all the time. They told me the story on Saturday. I understand that they are all meeting today as we speak to work out what they will do and how to debrief. It is extremely unhelpful to compare two types of services for a young girl who has experienced the level of distress that this girl has.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Could we be clear: Family and Community Services [FACS] actually had no contact with that child in the weeks before her death, is that correct? She had been referred to a non-government organisation by Juvenile Justice?

Ms WALK: She had been living in the residence since April. I do not know whether a person saw her on the street, but her case management was being managed by CatholicCare. Because she was in a Juvenile Justice facility one can imagine there were a number of other agencies also active in that management. I do not think it is my place to be talking about other agencies she was involved with. She has the right to some privacy.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Imagine how your cheap political point-scoring makes her family feel? How do you think they feel having you drag this through the newspapers?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I would assume that everyone is absolutely traumatised and horrified that a child has taken her own life.

Ms PRU GOWARD: You are exploiting it horribly.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: That is wrong. Minister, you have to be held to account for your responsibilities.

CHAIR: Order! I am not going to allow the death of a young Australian to be used as a political football during a budget estimates meeting. If you have care and concern, ask a question in a respectful manner.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: The service was closed by the Minister. It was a budget decision. It is reasonable for this Committee to hold the Minister to account for that decision.

Ms PRU GOWARD: The service was not closed.

CHAIR: The Minister and her advisors have outlined the 24-hour around the clock care that the young person was receiving.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: What we have heard is that it was not delivered by Family and Community Services.

Ms WALK: Can I reiterate again, and I do not think I can say it any more clearly, the people who were case managing her were case managing her right up until the moment of her death. I do not think we can be any clearer about that. She had very intensive management compared to what a street team would have been able to give. All I can say again is you cannot draw a causal link between whoever was involved in this young woman's life and her death. It is incredibly inappropriate for any agency to start to do that. We do not know the full circumstances of her death. That will be investigated by the police and the coroner and we should not try to do any drawing together of any involvement that anybody has had with her and her death.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Is the department reviewing those other cases that were with the Cabramatta Street Team to ensure that those children are not at the same risk that that young girl clearly was? Are those cases being reviewed to ensure that they have got an adequate level of service?

Ms WALK: Let me repeat that the 12 cases that are cases with the Cabramatta Street Team will be absorbed by the department. If they do not already have another caseworker involved from another service obviously we will take them on. Can I say once again young people are hard to engage and they often will choose their caseworkers and that is my understanding of what occurred with this young woman. She bonded very well with the workers that were there. I do not want to continue that discussion.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, in the absence of a dedicated Minister for housing and the lack of policy direction, are you now responsible for the Land and Housing Corporation?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are the Minister responsible, not Mr Constance?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, I am responsible. I made that very clear to the Director General, to all our staff and it has been on our website.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You made an announcement on Friday after the Auditor-General made that devastating report. I refer to the statement that you will introduce new incentives so more needy families can access public housing. But the only change you have announced is a rent rise; that is not an incentive, is it?

Ms PRU GOWARD: What rent rise? The vacant room charge?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: The bedroom charge; the bedroom tax?

Ms PRU GOWARD: The vacant bedroom charge. That enables us to offer people with three or four kids who have been living in shelters for years an opportunity for public housing. We have 16,000 properties where there are two or more vacant bedrooms and it is critical that people living in shelters with kids not for just two weeks but years—St Vincent de Paul have families in that situation—receive housing. There are people living with children for years in motels, cars or on a relative's floor, and to me it was critical that we ensure those children received—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You have cut the construction budget.

CHAIR: The Opposition time is over and the Hon. Paul Green has eight minutes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Just continuing with the subject of the bed charge. Are you aware of the absolute angst that this is causing—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, she does not care.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: —in the demographics that it affects? There are long-term families, parents and grandparents that have had their dwelling for quite a long time but do not necessarily have the money to pay for this. There is anxiety out there. How do you propose to manage that? I understand the cost is not a lot but the anxiety is deep.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think we have to remember the numbers of families without housing that are essentially homeless. I am conscious of the concerns expressed by older people who may have lived in a house with three or four bedrooms, three of which have been vacant for a number of years. We are not doing it across the State. We have identified three areas where there are both a reasonable number of properties with three or four bedrooms and also a reasonable number of smaller properties to which these people could be easily transferred without losing their local connections.

We have identified those three areas and we are focusing on ensuring that those families, those older people particularly, are offered two reasonable offers of a transfer within their community and if they reject it and it is reasonable grounds they continue to live there. If they have rejected two reasonable offers we do expect them to pay the vacant room charge and that is obviously because they have recognised that they are occupying a property that could better be occupied by a family.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I understand that. I will personalise this a little: My dad was in one of those situations for a long time. We were blessed to be able to have that help from the State.

Ms PRU GOWARD: How many children are in your family?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: There are seven children.

Ms PRU GOWARD: You can imagine that there are other families like yours.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I understand that. What I am trying to do is highlight the anxiety that brought to my dad after we all left home and his marriage broke up. That was the only place that dad knew and he felt secure. The situation is that a bed charge is meant to force him out. I understand it is meant to be an encouragement and to say there are other people out there that need this size house, but I could not imagine what devastation that would bring to his life in a situation where that was the only place he knew and felt secure and safe even though his world outside was falling apart. I feel for people like that. I understand trying to resettle a

lot of people that need that accommodation but there must be a level of compassion that allows those people to stay.

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is why they have two reasonable offers and it is only when they can be relocated within the same area.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Change is hard.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: There must be a level of compassion that would allow those people to stay.

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is why they have two reasonable offers and it happens only when they can be relocated within an area. Change is hard for them, but it is also hard for private renters when their children leave home because they must also consider downsizing. It is certainly also hard for people who own houses and who must downsize when their children leave home. Change is harder when people are surrounded by their community. However, we must be mindful that the alternative is thousands of children without a home. We are very conscious of the anxiety experienced by older people. That is not happening in all areas and our staff are working very hard to reassure people.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That house is now available. It will be interesting to see how many people live there.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It will be one family at a time.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Dad is now in a nursing home. When he needed it, it was a safe and secure home. What is the Government doing in the 2013 regulations to address the current inadequate provisions for the protection of children and young people with disabilities who are residents of assisted boarding houses?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is a question for the Minister for Disability Services and would be better put to him.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: The Boarding Houses Regulation 2013 provides for a five-year transition period for pre-existing authorised assisted boarding houses to meet requirements regarding the maximum number of residents and sleeping arrangements. Is it true that residents of assisted boarding houses will wait five years for implementation of minimum standard of living requirements such as lockable bedrooms to ensure privacy, clean and comfortable mattresses and other bedding, climate-appropriate bed linen which is clean and in good repair, bed linen which is not shared and which is washed before it is used by another resident and absorbent or waterproof linen for residents who may require it?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Again, that question would be better asked of Minister Ajaka because it also relates to boarding house regulations. I refer again to the vacant room charge. The policy is implemented statewide but we are targeting Mount Druitt and the coast because that is where we have large numbers of appropriate properties.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Does that mean you will delegate my boarding house questions to another Minister?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, because he is responsible for the regulations.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I refer to the dedicated roles and positions in the Protecting Aboriginal Children Together [PACT] program. Last October you identified a chief executive director for children and families position. I understand that that position has not been filled although it has been advertised twice. Why can you not fill a position like that? What has happened since last October when the position was first advertised?

Ms WALK: We have had some fabulous people acting in that position. Some applied for the job and were then poached by other great agencies, including the royal commission. The position has never been completely vacant. It is a policy position, not a front-line position. It is important because we have been working on child protection and legislative reforms. We have still been able to do that work with our colleagues in that area without someone permanently in that person. We have always tried to have someone acting in it and those

doing so have decades of experience in the area. We obviously want someone in the position permanently; it is better to have people in positions permanently. However, when that is not possible we have people acting.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: But that function has been continuing and there has been output.

Ms WALK: Absolutely. The legislative reform process has been undertaken and we are about to consider the final draft. It is not a front-line or operational position; it is a policy position.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: It involves the child protection paper and legislative reform.

Ms WALK: Yes, that is correct.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Will the report on the submissions about the child protection paper be released soon?

Ms WALK: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Will that precede the draft bill?

Ms WALK: I will take that question on notice. In response to an earlier question, there were 6,287 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care as at 30 June 2012. Obviously we ensure that we age our data and it is therefore a little early to provide the 2012-13 data.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: That is a significant increase.

Mr WALK: That is both statutory care and non-statutory care.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: That is my understanding. I will put some questions on notice about that. I am trying to get solid figures so that we know year by year how we are travelling. I appreciate that good work is being done.

Ms WALK: We have a number of really good dashboards. As we transition we have much better accounting and performance systems. I am happy to share the data.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I have read the Auditor-General's report and I appreciate having clarity so that year after year we know how we are travelling and can celebrate some good outcomes. How is the PACT program going? Will we see an expansion of the Shellharbour and Moree programs, which are going well?

Ms WALK: We are just receiving the evaluation. One of the things about PACT and the other initiatives that we have been rolling out is that they are teaching us about building a workforce in Aboriginal non-government organisations that want to work with at-risk children and families. That is relatively new in New South Wales. The Department of Community Services obviously has an Aboriginal workforce, which is critical in our work with at-risk children. Building a non-government Aboriginal workforce is also important. The PACT program has helped us to do that both in Shellharbour and Moree. Those programs are evolving differently. The Moree program is working with a community service centre that has many Aboriginal staff who are led by a wonderful Aboriginal manager of client services. It is different in Shellharbour because there are fewer Aboriginal staff and the role that PACT plays is much more advisory.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I will put some questions on notice about that. Was any consideration given to alternative funding for the Welfare Rights Centre given the late lodgement of its funding submission? I know that it is not, strictly speaking, a State issue, but the centre is helping people who are at risk, disadvantaged or vulnerable. It is performing an important service.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have met with the Welfare Rights Centre staff, who were obviously very distressed. We explained that their work almost entirely involves Centrelink issues, which are a Federal Government responsibility. We pointed out that we felt we needed to focus on child protection concerns because that is our key statutory responsibility. I wrote to Federal Minister Jenny Macklin and asked that she consider funding the centre. As the Federal Ombudsman observed, it was pretty poor that the Federal department did not provide avenues for Centrelink recipients to challenge or question any decisions made about them. I think the Federal Ombudsman took the view that that ought to be funded by a Federal agency. I encouraged Minister

Macklin to provide that funding because it was obviously directly relevant to her responsibilities, not to mine. I have never heard back from Minister Macklin.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I am interested in the Aboriginal Housing Office allocation of \$49 million to produce 103 dwellings. I previously asked about this and I want to follow up and make sure that there is clarity about where these houses are. That means that they come out at about \$475,000 each. I am interested to have again clarity about where these houses are, how many are produced and whether we are delivering those services.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am very proud to say that we have our first head of the Aboriginal Housing Office [AHO] in some years. The dedicated head is Paul Callaghan. Paul, I would like to invite you to answer that question.

Mr CALLAGHAN: With respect to the Parliament and the Committee, as is protocol with our people, Goojikku Koori Kidn Gadigal Burri Koori Worimi Burri. That is the language of my people of Port Stephens, the Worimi people. I pay my respects to my elders, past and present. I would also like, on behalf of our community, to pay respects to this Parliament. It is a really big deal to have an Aboriginal person here at the table today. Everyone is here with all sorts of passions, but our community would be really happy to think that there is an Aboriginal person here to talk about Aboriginal issues. So thank you for that opportunity. It is an absolute privilege to be in this role. I was the first Aboriginal director of a TAFE institute in New South Wales. It was a really good job, but this is my passion because it is about the future of our people. So thank you for the question.

The question of cost is about where demand is needed and also about funding. A lot of our funding comes from the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing [NPARIH], which is Commonwealth funding. That funding clearly targets remote communities. I am sure all of you have been to places like Wilcannia and Bourke. They are very costly places to go to, so construction is quite costly. And there is only so much cost a builder can absorb in terms of construction. It is certainly something I am very keen to look at.

In terms of performance, we have met 100 per cent of the targets for our new houses in New South Wales. We have also reached 100 per cent of targets delivering houses under the Employment Related Accommodation Program. That program is really exciting because it provides an opportunity for Aboriginal people from remote New South Wales to stay close to their studies, from which they can then obtain employment. There is no doubt that at this moment in time part of the AHO's role is about effective service delivery. It is great that you are asking a question about that. We are doing that well and meeting our targets but we are also laying the pavement for a better future for our people, where we are breaking the back of dependency and learned helplessness. I am talking about the things we have all seen throughout our lives. It is about putting that learned helplessness down, so that in the future our people will not have a dependency on social housing and will not need NPARIH funding for houses.

Our people, through such things as the Employment Related Accommodation Program, will be able to access jobs. They will be able to afford to make their own choices. That will break the back of this trans-generational pain and trans-generational poverty so that our people will aspire. They will say, "Dad has a job and Mum has a job. I can get a job." Then social housing is there for those who fall through the cracks but is not necessarily the norm. That is a challenge that I am taking on board with enthusiasm, inspiration and great support, because that is what it is all about.

The new AHO board's role is broadening the aspect of what we do and focusing on the family and the home, not just the individual. It is really exciting to tap into the broad framework of the Department of Family and Community Services and other agencies and to work together so that all of the things we have heard about here today—out-of-home care is another aspect of what we do in disability support—are brought together so that our people are empowered. As an Aboriginal person I think empowerment is about choice. It is about our people in the future having choices about homes, jobs and where they live. We all know, from looking at Closing the Gap, that that is not necessarily the case now.

In addition, we have upgraded 245 homes in terms of refurbishment and maintenance, and I am pleased to say that quite a few of those refurbishments have been done by Aboriginal builders and Aboriginal companies. That is exciting, and we are looking at how to expand that. In 2012-13 we delivered 35 new homes. I am not sure whether anybody saw 7.30 a couple of weeks or a month ago. It was about how we have

Aboriginal inmates at Cessnock jail building transportable homes and taking them out to Coonamble. Those homes are being utilised.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: It is the Pearson model, is it not, from central Australia?

Mr CALLAGHAN: It is similar to that. It is certainly something to explore. We have exceeded the target of 20 per cent Aboriginal employment in construction, with a workforce of 29 per cent. That is really important, and we need to go higher than that if we want to break the back of unemployment and disempowerment in our community. As I said, I took this job on because of the issue of housing, but it is far bigger than housing. It is about us all working together and creating better futures for our peoples—so it is about now and also about the future.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Can I just—

CHAIR: I think your time is over.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Excuse me, I appreciate greatly the presentation and the response, but my question was about the allocation of funds and where they are being delivered. I come from Bundjalung country, and my mob is saying to me, "Where are our houses?"

CHAIR: You can take it on notice. You would be prepared to have that answer.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I asked this question last year as well. That is the point. Last year we did not have someone in the position. I just want to know—

CHAIR: The witness can take it on notice and give a detailed response to the member. Thank you.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Minister, just going back to the earlier discussion on caseworker numbers in the Department of Family and Community Services, do you have any other information that you wish to provide to the Committee?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think it is very important that I restate that I have not misled the Parliament about caseworker numbers. I have repeatedly told the Parliament that the number goes up and down all the time. I have told the Parliament that, based on advice to me from the department. It is absolutely true that the issue of vacancies has been raised from time to time. It was raised with me by caseworkers—I think I am the first Minister to have had meetings with caseworkers—and on each occasion I have come back to the department and asked for an update. On each occasion I was advised that the number was about the same. Vacancies are an ongoing challenge for this sort of work, as I think we have already established. That is why we are now going to establish transparency measures such as the publication of the number of caseworkers by the end of the year. I would like to read into the transcript what I said to the Parliament in March this year:

I have told the department that I expect publication of caseworker numbers to commence this year. Caseworker numbers, as I have said in this House repeatedly, go up and down all the time; they always have, they did under Labor, and they always will.

Caseworker numbers will change. For example, the vacancy rate reflects not the number of budgeted caseworker positions but the number of caseworkers on the ground. There might be a vacancy of 300 caseworkers at the moment but, as I said, in 2010 it was 495. So you have to be very clear about what you are talking about.

The clear expectation of the government is that the budgeted number of caseworkers, which is 2,068, is to be filled. I gave that very clear direction to my Director General some months ago. The vacancies that occur from time to time—perhaps 300 at the moment, reflecting on an earlier discussion, and 495 when Labor was in power in 2010—shows a different complexion compared to the actual vacancies. In terms of what the Government can direct, which is the number of budgeted positions, that number is the same.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Mr Callaghan, I found your comments very interesting, informative and uplifting. Following on from that I wonder if you could tell us what measures you have taken to improve governance of Indigenous housing. That might dovetail with—

Mr CALLAGHAN: For Aboriginal people storylines are really important. As I look around here I see the storyline of 1850 to 1980. That is the storyline of this Parliament and something to be proud of. That is

certainly something about legacy. When I look back after my career is over I will say, "Wow, I was part of something fantastic." That is what is happening at the moment—not because of me; it is because of the momentum I can see within the Aboriginal Housing Office. If you look at my mother's story you will find that she grew up in Karuah Aboriginal Mission—the roadblock that used to be on the way to Taree where the bridge was. I remember that she lived in a corrugated iron house with earthen floors. Now they have their third iteration of newer houses and it is signed up to what the Aboriginal Housing Office calls "Build and Grow" and it is through a sub-lease. So it shows that things are working and they are working because of the hard work and the foresight of a lot of people.

There is no doubt that the Government is committed to providing housing services that contribute to improving lives. As I have said, it is not just about this moment in time; it is 20 years hence when we have less dependence on public housing and other things. Part of that no doubt is governance and current systems within the Aboriginal Housing Office. Something that is really great about my role is that there is such a willingness to listen to Aboriginal people. If you look at history you often find that a government with lots of enthusiasm goes out and starts telling communities what is happening for the betterment of communities and not engaging. But what is happening at the moment is that there is engagement. Certainly over the past few years there was a part-time basis for the CEE. Now I am on board full time which is really exciting and there is engagement.

The community is really excited, they see a way forward and they are talking to me, which is a great sign. When people do not talk to you then you know that you have problems. They are talking to me and sharing and we are looking forward to the future. Part of that is a strong and experienced board about improving housing and getting that advice from Aboriginal people, and underpinning the board are three regional advisory councils covering New South Wales that will inform the board as well. The board was recently announced in Parliament, which was one of the highlights of my life. I do not mind admitting that I got quite teary because Parliament is really important for our people. We were announced in Parliament. Symbolically it highlights that Aboriginal people are significant and it gives Aboriginal communities hope. For a long time our communities have run out of hope. So my congratulations go to the Parliament because you could hear a pin drop on that day. That gives me hope that there is a united, concerted, respected support for Aboriginal people.

So I am here as the chief executive. My role is to lead but we are doing it together with the Minister and certainly with the board. We are looking at Aboriginal traditions, cultural principles and communities. The board has already had two meetings so we are up and running. The first meeting was an induction where we got to know and agree on where we were heading. The second meeting was incredibly productive and, for the benefit of this Committee, the kinds of things to which there has been a commitment are strengthening and growing the capacity of the Aboriginal housing sector to help meet the housing needs of Aboriginal people into the future; delivering housing options for Aboriginal people through both our own stock and those of the Aboriginal community housing providers; and delivering housing options based on research where communities tell us what they need. We have got an elder and we will be getting other elders to go around and talk to communities to give us qualitative evidence of what they have seen which will more accurately inform asset portfolio plans and social housing strategies. That in turn blends the important elements of people and places to deliver sustainable fit-for-purpose solutions for Aboriginal people across New South Wales.

To reinforce what I said earlier it is really important that Aboriginal communities believe they are being heard, which is what is happening across the State now, because each community is different. Also it is exciting to know that we are addressing homelessness and overcrowding for Aboriginal people where our focus will be on early intervention strategies or honouring intervention strategies; in other words, a front-ended approach which goes to breaking the cycle of disadvantage. I will finish with one really good news story. The board, after its second meeting, came and met the AHO staff at Parramatta—you are welcome to come and meet the staff at Parramatta at any time; they get a bit lonely in Parramatta—and each board member spoke about why they agreed to sit on the board. There were two middle-aged men who cried because they see this role as such a privilege and they feel so privileged to be part of where we are heading, and so do I. So the board and I look forward to the future with the Minister's office. I am very excited about where we are heading. Thank you for the question.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Minister, referring to the public housing system in general, can you advise the Committee what challenges the Government is tackling?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Public housing, as you are probably aware from the Auditor-General's report, is certainly a system that has been put under enormous strain. I think in the preceding years before we came to office 5,500 properties had been sold and, of course, the waiting lists have continued to grow. The Auditor-

General's report, which was called "Making the Best Use of Public Housing", certainly makes it very clear that there are deep and systemic challenges facing the public housing system. A revolving door of housing Ministers under Labor did not help and the housing stock we have is ageing and costly to maintain. Today around 95 per cent of tenants rely on Centrelink benefits as their main source of income whereas in the 1960s, 85 per cent of tenants were employed. So it makes a very big difference to the sorts of supports you need to provide for people today in public housing.

People's need for housing stems from multiple and complex needs including disability, mental illness, substance abuse issues, domestic violence, unemployment and low education levels. The average tenancy lengths for public housing is now over 11 years, which is very much at odds with the objective of social housing being a safety net providing support only when most needed and only for the duration of that need. Commonwealth funding for social housing has certainly declined substantially in real terms since the mid-1990s and the low income of tenants means that rent revenues are falling.

These factors, combined with increasing tenancy management and maintenance costs, constrain the Government's ability to work with tenants to break disadvantage. I would like to ask Mike Allen, who is the chief executive of Housing NSW, to provide some more details about the challenges ahead and the changes we have already made to the system to make it as fair and as transparent as possible.

Mr ALLEN: We have a significant challenge. As well as our growing housing register there are about 28,000 people in New South Wales who are homeless. New South Wales, like all public housing authorities around our country, has a financially and socially unsustainable public housing portfolio. The social housing system is not sufficiently focused on breaking disadvantage—a significant and growing homelessness challenge, as I have mentioned—and a private rental market that is often impenetrable to vulnerable low-income families. This is a very challenging policy environment, but through working better and smarter we are confident that we can improve services and lives for children and clients.

To date we have held an amnesty to encourage tenants to come forward if they had additional people living on their property to make sure households paid the correct amount of rent, and many hundreds—indeed, thousands—of people did come forward. We have changed the policy on succession of tenancy to discourage intergenerational welfare dependence and to stop people jumping ahead of applicants who are waiting for priority housing assistance. Also, as we have discussed today, we have announced a new approach to filling vacant bedrooms where tenants who refuse reasonable offers of accommodation will pay a vacant bedroom charge.

It is important in trying to deliver any social housing system that there are strong principles of fairness and equity, and that very much goes to the heart of trying to balance the needs of those people who are already being assisted in the system with the needs of those people who are yet to be assisted by the system. That is an ongoing challenge to get the balance right and there is always a lot of emotion around some of those difficult decisions. This is a challenge and a genuine opportunity for government, in partnership with our great non-government organisations and providers and other parts of the service sector, to consider how the social housing system can be more responsive to contemporary needs and be more financially sustainable.

New South Wales has been leading proudly the development of the national regulatory system for community housing on behalf of the Commonwealth and the other States and Territories. A six-month testing and evaluation phase started on 1 July this year, and from 1 January 2014 the national regulatory system will fully commence with an 18-month transition period for those providers. The national regulatory system will, importantly, provide the community housing sector with a consistent regulatory environment to support its growth and development, to pave the way for future housing development, to reduce the regulatory burden on providers operating across State and Territory borders and to provide a level playing field for new entrants to the sector. The New South Wales social housing system needs to protect disadvantage and make the system as fair and as transparent as possible.

CHAIR: There is limited time, so I ask Mr Allen to quickly outline the progress that has been made in reforming that specialist homelessness service sector.

Mr ALLEN: Last week the Government announced investment of \$24.5 million to deliver 50 new homes for vulnerable young people and women and children escaping domestic violence. I know our Minister was pleased to be joined by Tracy Howe from Domestic Violence NSW and Michael Coffey from Yfoundations to make this announcement. Importantly, the Minister also announced last year the Going Home, Staying Home

homelessness reforms. Those reforms are very much focused on people who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness to find safe accommodation to get secure support services and to get practical assistance while they stabilise their housing and their lives. This is work that importantly we are doing with the specialist homelessness service system providers in New South Wales. They are many and varied across our State, and we have been working with representatives of peak organisations to deliver this specialist homelessness reform. We have also had a panel of well-regarded industry experts to assist us in that process—none more important than people like Eileen Baldrige from the University of New South Wales, who is a renowned homelessness researcher. I just heard a buzzer and perhaps I should be polite enough to acknowledge that is the time for me to stop.

CHAIR: If there is any part of the remainder of your answer that you can provide to us, that would be wonderful. We will have a quick break before we move on to the next portfolio.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

LINDA MATTHEWS, Executive Director, Women NSW, sworn and examined:

MIKE ALLEN, Chief Executive, Housing NSW, Department of Family and Community Services,

MICHAEL COUTTS-TROTTER, Director General, Department of Family and Community Services,

KERRY ANNE BOLAND, Children's Guardian, Office of the Children's Guardian,

MAREE WALK, Chief Executive, Community Services, Department of Family and Community Services,

MAURA BOLAND, Deputy Director General, Department of Family and Community Services, and

PAUL CALLAGHAN, Chief Executive, Aboriginal Housing Office, Department of Family and Community Services, on former oath:

CHAIR: We will now consider the portfolio of Women's Affairs.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: With your indulgence, I would like to firstly congratulate the chief executive of the Aboriginal Housing Office, Mr Paul Callaghan. I note that he has left the room but I congratulate him on his appointment. Minister, more than 50 per cent of victims of domestic violence and sexual assault apply for victim's compensation. Evidence particularly during one of our recent debates showed that it took years, sometimes decades before victims of sexual assault and domestic violence seek help. Is it a fact that the changes to the victims compensation scheme by the Government will disproportionately affect women, particularly in the areas of historical domestic violence and child sexual assault?

Ms PRU GOWARD: A rise in the number of sexual assault and domestic violence incidents in recent years has certainly resulted in an increasing proportion of younger claimants and female claimants. Domestic violence claims have increased from 360 in 2000 to 2,531 lodged in 2010. Under the old scheme a victim of domestic violence would wait an average of 30 months for his or her matter to be finalised. Under the new scheme a domestic violence victim is eligible for up to \$5,000 for financial assistance for their immediate needs which could be used for relocation to ensure the safety, wellbeing and health of the victim, the changing of locks or to put in other safety measures and payment of medical expenses for injuries sustained.

The victim may also be eligible for up to \$30,000 under the financial assistance for economic loss category. This could be used for cost-of-living expenses where the applicant cannot establish loss of actual earnings, or if the victim has sustained actual loss of earnings they could receive up to \$20,000 towards this. There is up to \$5,000 for justice-related expenses which could be used to attend criminal proceedings, or if they are a witness it could be used to take a support person along; and up to \$1,500 for loss of personal effects which could be used to purchase clothing for the child and the victim if they had to leave their violent environment in a hurry. A domestic violence victim may also be eligible for up to \$5,000 as a payment in recognition of the trauma and loss suffered.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: For many women who have suffered years of sexual assault and particularly young girls, it takes many years for them to come forward to obtain a validation that what was done to them was wrong. Those women will no longer be entitled to compensation.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I suggest you take up the detail of those questions with the Attorney General.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: But you are the Minister for Women.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: And women across the State who are victims of domestic violence, rape and sexual assault rely on you.

Ms PRU GOWARD: They do.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: What are you doing about it?

Ms PRU GOWARD: And validation is a very important experience but it is not a financial experience. Validation is very much about the victim feeling that she has been believed, that she has been supported and it is not her fault that she has been a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault. It seems that they are the most critical factors in ensuring that victims of domestic violence or sexual assault can stabilise their lives and move on.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I spoke to a number of women organisations in the Hunter. A legal service said to me that in one family a woman and a number of her female children had been victims of domestic violence and under the previous scheme they were entitled to \$200,000 in compensation. Halfway through their case the Government introduced a new scheme under which they will be entitled to only \$17,500. Why have you made such drastic cuts? This affects women, their work, having families and their entire life. What will you do about it? What will you say to these women who are no longer entitled to compensation?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I say that the most important thing we can do for them and for thousands of other women is to reform the domestic violence system. The Auditor-General found that the administration of domestic violence programs and policies in New South Wales was unconnected and often exposed the woman to further violence and that is why we have embarked on a domestic and family violence reform program which is our commitment to making communities safe and free from domestic and family violence. They are an all-of-government response. There will be a statewide system that supports a consistent response—the victim does not have to keep telling the same story to different people who each interpret it differently—for people impacted by domestic family violence regardless of who they are and how they have entered the system. You might recall Tracy Howe from Domestic Violence NSW welcomed the integrated response to tackling family and domestic violence. She said:

We look forward to working with the Government to make perpetrators accountable, ensure women get a holistic cross-agency service response while making inroads with the proposed prevention platform.

The New South Wales Auditor-General has estimated that domestic and family violence costs the New South Wales economy more than \$4.5 billion every year, and absolutely undoubtedly the cost borne by victims is very significant. We need to reduce the rates of domestic violence, in particular, reduce recidivism of domestic violence which means working more effectively with perpetrators and victims. That is why we prioritised \$4 million from Family and Community Services over three years to fund the initial implementation of the reforms which we will then evaluate.

Those reforms were developed in close consultation with more than 300 sector workers who support women and children facing the immediate dangers and long-lasting effects of domestic and family violence. We are going to ensure that there is a consistent approach to risk assessment and management. We have tremendous support from the police and, of course, the new domestic violence orders that the police are now able to issue I think it will make an enormous difference to the speed with which we can ensure the safety of women and children. We will have local cross-agency safety meetings for government and non-government providers together integrating it to help high risk victims. We will improve information-sharing capabilities, which will require amending privacy legislation. You might not be aware of it, I recently announced a men's telephone counselling and referral service to support men who are not in the criminal justice system in order to change their behaviour.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am aware of it. Will you be speaking to your ministerial colleagues, the Attorney General, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Minister for Finance and Services about reviewing victims compensation legislation for future victims?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Obviously we need to ensure that the system is fair and reasonable and expeditious. I think that is what these reforms are meant to achieve.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Will you speak to them about reviewing the compensation?

Ms PRU GOWARD: This is an ongoing discussion between Ministers.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You do not make a commitment?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I do not think I need to make a commitment. It is an ongoing matter of discussion between Ministers.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In regards to the domestic and family violence framework that is being developed, will you advise which consulting firm was engaged to provide advice in the development of the framework?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think we discussed this last year. KPMG were the consultants and its job was to look at ways in which we could reform and improve the system but also to facilitate the community consultations.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Was KPMG selected through a competitive tender process?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I might ask the Deputy Director General to respond.

Ms M. BOLAND: Yes, they were selected through a competitive process.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In terms of the total fees and payments or reimbursements made to KPMG, will you inform the Committee of the figures?

Ms M. BOLAND: Could we take those figures on notice so that we make sure that we give you an exact figure? We would also like to make sure that we have the end-of-year reconciliation appropriate so that you get the correct figure for the last year.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Are the payments complete now? Is KPMG's role complete or do they still have an ongoing role?

Ms M. BOLAND: No, the engagement is complete.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Have there been any meetings or discussions with Mr Dominic Kelly over the development of the domestic and family violence framework?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We will have to take that on notice. I do not believe so, but rather than mislead you, I will clarify it with the department.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You do not know the answer to that?

Ms M. BOLAND: None of us at the table is aware of any meetings with Mr Dominic Kelly. Possibly you could let us know who Mr Dominic Kelly is.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Who is he?

Ms M. BOLAND: I know that we consulted with more than 300 people across the State in the preparation of this and I would like to make sure that we were not excluding somebody who had been involved in the conversations.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: His name is Mr Dominic Kelly. I ask the same question in terms of meetings and discussions over the development of the domestic and family violence framework with Mr David Begg.

Ms M. BOLAND: I do not think we are in a position to answer any questions about specific individuals who may have been involved in consultations.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We consulted with 300 people.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I will go through these further names if you would take them down; it is a total of five: Mr Chris Stone, Ms Natalie Christiansen and Mr Michael Photios.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I will not ask for the spelling; I think I have it.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Well, I can certainly say that I have not met with any of those people.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You have not met with any of those people or had any discussions—

Ms PRU GOWARD: I certainly have not met with Michael Photios whose name I know and Mr Stone, I have not met with him either over domestic violence.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: And you do not know Mr Dominic Kelly?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Well, it is not an uncommon name in Sydney.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: On the PremierState Consulting Pty Ltd website under Mr Dominic Kelly under his name it has that Dominic has worked for key members of the O'Farrell ministerial and parliamentary team, and has strong relationships within the Liberal Party room commencing with now Minister for Community Services, Pru Goward.

Ms PRU GOWARD: That Dominic Kelly.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Ah.

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, that Dominic Kelly worked for me in opposition for a few months.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: That is the same Dominic Kelly.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I certainly have not met with him over domestic violence as a Minister.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Anyway, you will take those questions on notice?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, can you tell me how many women and their children are homeless every night in New South Wales?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think we might have to take that on notice. Mike Allen is not with us.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Can you provide the cost of housing women and children in motel rooms every night in New South Wales?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Again that is the question for the Department of Housing and I am happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It is a very important matter. We need to get the figures.

Ms PRU GOWARD: If you are interested in what we are actually doing—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, I want to know the figures because on the Central Coast, for example, between 1,500 and 2,000 people are homeless every night, and most of them are women and children. It has been reported that some of them even live in shipping containers and old storage rooms and that there are only three refuges on the Central Coast. We need to know what the Government is doing and how much Housing is spending on providing—

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Crisis accommodation.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: There is no crisis accommodation. I want to know how much is being paid to Formula 1 and those two-star motels?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Okay.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Homelessness and housing for older women is becoming a significant issue. Can you tell me how many women over 45 are homeless in New South Wales? That is a significant issue going forward.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: There are not many homeless shelters that cater to older women. Is the Government going to build more shelters for women over 45 and older women?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Obviously as part of our homelessness reforms we want to make sure that homelessness services are located in the right places where there is demand.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: What about older women?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That certainly applies also to the changing demographics.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Will you provide additional funding for older women's shelters?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We are looking at actually keeping people out of homelessness rather than—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: But if you read the statistics there is an increase in elderly women becoming homeless and I want to know what the Government is doing. Do you have plans or are you providing additional funding?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We are in the process of reviewing and refining our homelessness program and certainly I am very conscious of it.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: And are you looking to older women?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We inherited a system, as you would know, where some areas—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: This is your third budget and projections were made in Budget Paper No. 6 in 2011-12 that there will be an increase of elderly women who will not be able to afford to live in housing.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have to get the resources in the right place.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are the Government. Are you going to provide the additional funding?

Ms PRU GOWARD: You had 16 years to muck it up.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: This is a projected figure. We built 6,000 properties and you are disposing of double that amount.

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, actually, you sold 5,500 of them.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No. Read the Auditor-General's report.

CHAIR: Order! The Hon. Sophie Cotsis will ask questions, not make statements.

Ms PRU GOWARD: You sold 5,500 of them.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Read page 11 of the Auditor-General's report.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, and that is what he said.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: How many staff in Women NSW are on temporary contracts?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will take that one on notice.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You do not have those figures?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Well, why would I have those figures? We have a fantastic unit.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Because this is budget estimates and you should have the number of staff, full-time staff, part-time staff and contractors.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We certainly have the number of staff.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Ms Matthews, could you tell the Committee how many staff we have in the Office for Women NSW? How many contractors do you have in the Office for Women?

Ms MATTHEWS: We will get back to you on that one. We will take it on notice.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So you do not know how many contractors you have. Minister, how much have you spent on consultants in the past year?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will ask the director general to answer that one.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Just to be clear, this is for the department as a whole or simply for this portfolio area?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Women NSW? How much has been spent on consultants?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I am sorry; I do not have that data.

Ms M. BOLAND: We would have to get the reconciled figures.

CHAIR: Take the question on notice.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You do not have the figures on the cost of consultants.

CHAIR: They will be taking it on notice

Ms PRU GOWARD: As I think has already been said, you do need the reconciled figures and that is what you will be provided with.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: In a media release in October 2012 you announced \$9.8 million over three years for a domestic and family violence grants program and then in a subsequent media release in July this year you announced \$2 million over three years for a men's telephone counselling service to try to reduce domestic violence. Is this \$2 million a component of the initial \$9.8 million or is this a separate program?

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is part of the \$9.8 million and it was well supported because I think it is generally recognised that perpetrators and indeed men need a counselling and advisory service that supports them and assists them in making sensible decisions.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Does that take money away from any other programs that are going to be funded?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have always foreshadowed that that was a component of these funding programs and the women's movement and in particular the domestic violence movement recognises that if we do not start to address the behaviour of men nothing will change with respect to domestic violence. Men will remain offending and we will continue to invest billions of dollars in a service that chases its tail, so that has been well recognised as it should be.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: In another media release in October 2012 you announced \$600,000 to establish a similar service to support men's behaviour. Was the \$600,000 spent in its entirety in 2012?

Ms PRU GOWARD: The \$600,000 is out of that contract and that was what was spent in that year.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: That was spent completely in that year?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Have you done any monitoring and evaluation of the program to assess its effectiveness?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will ask the deputy director general to answer that question. Of course, evaluations are absolutely critical.

Ms M. BOLAND: All I can do is echo what the Minister has just said. Evaluation is absolutely critical to all of the programs that we have put in place. One of the things we have insisted on with every piece of grant funding that we do now is that there is a full evaluation framework in place for it and that we evaluate how it goes as it goes so that we can learn from it.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Have you evaluated that program before putting in another \$2 million for the next three years?

Ms M. BOLAND: The first year's funding was \$600,000 of the \$2 million in total. I could not be entirely accurate on the exact amounts per year, but there was a component for the first year. The service is in the process of being established at the moment. As I say, evaluation is critical. We are working quite closely with the provider to be able to make sure that we can track how well that is going. We want to basically be able to understand that this is hitting the mark. We want to make sure that it is making a difference for the people it is supporting. We want to make sure that we are getting good value for taxpayers' investment in this area as well.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Will the evaluation and monitoring be done independently or will it be done through Women NSW?

Ms M. BOLAND: Certainly, I can say that there are some measures being put in place at the start to make sure that as contract managers we can make sure they are meeting all the requirements of the contract. That ongoing management will be done in that way. The ultimate evaluation will be done via a process still to be negotiated between Women NSW and the service provider.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Could the final reports from KPMG as was alluded to before and other consultants' documents related to the domestic and family violence reform work be tabled for the information of Parliament?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think we have already agreed that we have taken those questions on notice.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Are you happy to table those reports?

Ms M. BOLAND: There are a number of outputs from KPMG as a result of this and most of the actual salient material has been captured in any material that has been released publicly. There was the consultation document, which is publicly available, and there are a series of support documents as well that went into some of the elements of reform in much more detail. That has basically extracted the information from the work from KPMG and made it available publicly. We had a very strong commitment as a result of the co-design with the service providers to make sure that we had as much information out there as we could.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: A fair bit of work has gone into this particular reform already. Could the Minister tell me when a decision is expected on how the reforms will be implemented? What funding will be provided by the Government to implement these reforms?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That will be decided later this year. Obviously, we have had an enormous amount of consultation; some might say an exhaustive amount of consultation. When it is ready for announcement that will be later this year.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Is there an anticipated date for completion?

Ms PRU GOWARD: By the end of the year. Between now and the end of the year. Not long to go.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Of the \$3 million allocated this year to the domestic and family violence funding program, how much is allocated for the local Domestic and Family Violence Committee Grants?

Ms MATTHEWS: It is \$80,000.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: The closing date for this particular grants program in 2012-13 was November 2012. Has the funding reached the successful applicants from last year? The closing date of last year's program was announced as November. Has the funding reached all the successful grant applicants?

Ms MATTHEWS: All those who acquitted their grants have been, yes.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Could we have a list of those successful grants and the applicants, on notice of course?

Ms MATTHEWS: Yes.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Is monitoring and evaluation tied to those particular grants as well?

Ms MATTHEWS: The grants are only \$1,000 each. So there is very limited evaluation required for grants of that size.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: But will the program overall be evaluated?

Ms MATTHEWS: Yes.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: As you all know, there is a worrying upward trend in young women self-inflicted injury rates, especially compared to men.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: What is the Government doing to address this upward trend of young women intentionally self-harming?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That trend was identified in this year's annual report for Women NSW, which is another of our great transparency measures. Of course, these figures are now available for everyone to see. It is a matter for the Minister for Health. The Minister for Health is very conscious of it. I suggest that you direct your questions to her as the primary agency and certainly the office of Women NSW is very happy to work collaboratively with the health department on self-harming.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Will there be any budget allocations within the Women NSW portfolio for that specific women's issue?

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is something to which the health department is able to give consideration. We have a very limited budget. The Government's priorities, as you probably are aware, are domestic violence and increasing the proportion of women in non-traditional trades. The office is fully occupied, but because we monitor the report and outcomes of Women NSW that is why you and I are aware of it, I think. It certainly is something that has been drawn to the attention of the Department of Health.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, you deserve congratulations on the telephone counselling service for men. One way we can help women is to deal with men and their behaviour. A lot of men are herd men with learned behaviours and they need to learn new behaviours. It is a worthwhile spent budget of \$2 million. I highly recommend that it continue if we are to truly help and lower the number of domestic violence incidents. The evaluation is great, but we did not hear when the first level evaluation for that program will come out. Do we have a date and time to expect to see something?

Ms PRU GOWARD: This is for the men's telephone counselling service?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Yes.

Ms MATTHEWS: It is about to start in October. There is really not a lot to evaluate just yet.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: But on the time line? I am sure you have an overall strategy of how it runs and what points you will evaluate?

Ms MATTHEWS: Yes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: When is your first point of evaluation?

Ms M. BOLAND: The precise timing for evaluation is still under negotiation. We will make sure, in line with the Minister and the Government's commitment to transparency, that the evaluations will be made publicly available. We think it is important that there is not a sufficient evidence base across the area of domestic and family violence. We have a very strong commitment to making sure that the information we find as a result of any of the work that we do becomes publicly available so that others can use that in theirs. We also are trying to work nationally to make sure that the information that others find as a result of their evaluations becomes available to us so that we can learn from that as well.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Dr Faruqi's point is that you do not want to be pulling money out and using it if it is ineffective. The earliest indications on the evaluation would be handy to make sure that if you have to tweak the sales, so to speak, you can do that to achieve better outcomes?

Ms M. BOLAND: Absolutely. There will be ongoing monitoring of the operations, even in advance of the evaluation, to make sure that we are getting the numbers there, to see what the trends are, to see what the themes are and the issues that are arising. The other thing to mention, of course, is that a similar service has been operating in Victoria for some time. We looked at that very closely before we pulled back and described a model for New South Wales. We think we have built quite heavily on the work Victoria has done and some of its successes. We think in this case we are investing in a successful model but, as I say, we have a strong commitment to making sure we are being successful. So we will do both the combination of the monitoring and the evaluation.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Given the high level of violence that apparently is experienced by women involved in prostitution, how much funding has been allocated in this year's budget to help women who are trying to get out of prostitution? What specific programs is the New South Wales Government currently funding to help women leave prostitution?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think you would do better to direct those questions to the Attorney and to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I thought the Women's portfolio was your responsibility. Obviously, I am after the true spirit of this portfolio, which is the welfare of women. I understand the legal side, obviously.

Ms PRU GOWARD: But that is what the Women NSW annual report does. It shines a light on all these issues. It is up to line agencies with encouragement to take up those issues and to see what policy responses can be applied to them. It is not for an agency of 17 or 20 staff to do the work of the entire New South Wales Government. It was never its purpose. We have some clear focuses but the annual report is a useful mechanism for drawing these issues to the attention of other agencies and Ministers.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, given that women of lower socio-economic status experience greater psychological distress than other women and are more likely to smoke, leave school early and less likely to have tertiary qualifications—

Ms PRU GOWARD: All from the annual report.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: —what specific steps are you taking to address these concerns?

Ms PRU GOWARD: They are issues that need to be taken up by the community and the relevant Minister. I certainly raised them publicly and the report is intended to encourage exactly that sort of discussion. There was a time in New South Wales when there was something called the Department for Women which had a huge number of staff and its job was to second-guess every agency. As far as I know it was disbanded by Labor because it was not effective. We do have to rely on a well-integrated reformist government to pick up information that is available for the first time in the annual report. This is a report that we have published every

year. It was an election commitment and its purpose is to draw these issues to the attention of interest groups, the lobby groups, the community more generally, the media and the relevant Minister and agency.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: My next question will be relegated to the same situation.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: How about the Minister for the Arts?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What role are you playing as Minister for Women in supporting women in sport?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Ask the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I was the patron for Womensport and Recreation NSW. Again, we publish—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Ask Graham Annesley.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, I think you should. If you really believe that women do have equal rights—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Not under your Government.

Ms PRU GOWARD: —you would ask other Ministers because it is absolutely impossible—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: The facts tell us otherwise in sport.

Ms PRU GOWARD: —to achieve equality of choice and opportunity for men and women if you do not expect other agencies and government departments to have effective positions and policies that respond to shortcomings for women in their areas of responsibility. This is mainstreaming. It has been done by the United Nations, it is now part of government practice around the world and it has finally arrived in New South Wales. The annual report is a useful way of drawing those matters to the attention of the appropriate Minister who has the program and policy levers to make the changes that are necessary. It is fatuous of the Opposition to suggest that it could be done in any other way. It might explain why under Labor nothing was achieved.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You should be advocating for women.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I want to ask one last question for my girls.

Ms PRU GOWARD: The annual report is a great document for advocacy for women.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am running out of time. How will the Government's funding program for women increase the number of girls and women entering non-traditional trades?

Ms PRU GOWARD: This is a key 2021 objective of the Government.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are cutting tape.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is recognised that for 70 per cent of girls who do not attend university, who do not have that privilege or capacity, they use their other gifts and we provide them with the opportunities that are available to girls that do go to university. It has been a badly neglected area of effort and it is high time that governments focused on the 70 per cent of girls who leave school. That is what the Investing in Women Funding Program has been established to do. We offer funding to local government, non-government and industry organisations for local projects that encourage women to enter non-traditional trades. We have recently funded 11 projects across New South Wales representing a range of trades and organisations that include local government, the non-government training sector, employers and regional, rural and metropolitan areas and target groups for girls, women and employers. We want to see more girls in the non-traditional trades. They are wonderful occupations, they are often lucrative and they enable, as they do for male tradies, great flexibility and the capacity to manage work-life balance.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Why don't you fix their conditions first?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Is there an apprenticeship program to encourage girls to enter those occupations?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I have announced various aspects of it many times. That is what the New South Wales Council for Women's Economic Opportunity is focused on and we have a number of employer groups on that council.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are cutting tape.

Ms PRU GOWARD: All the grants are on the website and we are always encouraging people with innovative ideas who have commitment to improving the representation of women and girls in non-traditional occupations to bring forward their ideas.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Following on from your comment just a few minutes ago about a fatuous Opposition, it would be fair to say, would it not, that women's policy in New South Wales has come a long way since Labor was in office?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are joking, aren't you?

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: How has Women NSW transformed itself over the past 2½ years into a dynamic policy unit focusing on what matters most for women?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Dynamic policy unit?

CHAIR: Minister, ignore all interjections which are disorderly at all times and answer the question.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Let's have a debate about women's policy. It is a disgrace.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Point of order: I am not here to debate Opposition members of the Committee. I am here to ask questions and the Minister is keen to answer the questions.

Ms PRU GOWARD: The New South Wales women's reform agenda is pretty clear. The Government has committed to addressing gender imbalances, improving opportunities for women and girls and ensuring their safety. That is why our agenda, as outlined in NSW 2021, commits us to reducing domestic and family violence and increasing the proportion of women employed in non-traditional occupations in New South Wales. That is a significant part of improving the economic capacity and choices available to women and girls in this State, and with an improved economic capacity comes leadership capacity. A longer term reform agenda has been developed to meet these goals. The Government did not want bits and pieces and pork barrelling, it wanted a strong focus on people and not just programs. We are working with key partners harnessing an enormous community capacity through stronger partnerships with non-government organisations, other government agencies and with business and we are building the evidence base on the status of women in New South Wales.

It is not easy work. The factors contributing to domestic and family violence are complex, and ensuring the annual report is as comprehensive and well designed as possible and focused on the issues that are relevant is challenging and resource intensive. We are working to continue the transformation and we have a wonderful dynamic team. I would like Ms M. Boland and Ms Matthews, Executive Director of Women NSW, to take you through that.

Ms M. BOLAND: I am incredibly proud of the work of Women NSW. Over the past 18 to 20 months I have been involved with the organisation. It has become a unit that has real impact. I will talk first of all about the domestic and family violence reforms. I will speak briefly because I am conscious the Committee is aware of those reforms. It appears you have looked at them, which is fantastic. We are proud of the work that has been done there. The reform spreads across government. It is about trying to redesign the way the service system works and importantly it is being co-designed with the non-government sector who are many of the service providers. It would not have been reasonable for it to be just across the government sector.

We have consulted with more than 300 front-line workers asking those who deal directly with women and children to tell us what they think we need to do to better support and protect the victims of domestic violence—and they told us. It has been important in shaping the reforms, and the results from an analysis of what is out there by us and various partners across the government and the non-government sectors have led to

the proposed domestic and family violence reforms contained in *It Stops Here*. *It Stops Here* is really about a new integrated way of working. This is the issue of domestic and family violence that was explored by the parliamentary committee. We have tried to deliver a response that addresses those concerns.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: It was a recommendation from the Committee itself.

Ms M. BOLAND: That is absolutely right.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: We did not explore it; we recommended it.

Ms M. BOLAND: Absolutely. This is the attempt that we have made to respond exactly to that concern. I apologise, but it was raised by some of the participants, me included, as something that was needed. It was great to see that recommendation. We have proposed a way that brings together government agencies, non-government agencies, community service providers, victims and perpetrators to get better protection from a system that is more coordinated and more responsive to needs. To move into another area, the attempt to enhance economic opportunities and security for women in New South Wales, we have been working consistently to try to increase the representation of women in better paying, non-traditional occupations, particularly women from lower socioeconomic groups.

We obviously do not look at any of these initiatives in isolation. We are very much pulling together the information that women in New South Wales are giving us and connecting that to the policy reforms that we are trying to do. In a sense, we are seeing the role of Women NSW in there as a strategic catalyst. The increase in women's proportion in non-traditional trades will not come by government alone. It is very much centred in the role that the training and employment sectors play, as well as how they work with State Government, with local government, with industry, with employers, with not-for-profit organisations. Indeed, with the women themselves who need to consider that this is a prospect for them, instead of just automatically—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Career advisers.

Ms M. BOLAND: Yes, we have been working closely with the Department of Education and Communities to ensure that career advisers are equipped to give young women the information they need to be able to consider that this might be a career choice for them and it will give them a decent amount of pay. We are all proud of the Groundbreaking *Women in New South Wales* report. It was hard work for the first year, and everybody sat back at the end and said, "That is fantastic." We had lots of people give us amazing feedback—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It has been done before. Check your record.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Never by you.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Check the records. Sandra Nori.

Ms M. BOLAND: —about the information that it gave them. But we did not rest there. We continued to work to make sure it was relevant. We had a considerable number of suggestions of additional information that could be included as a result of people reading it, so the second year sees additional information. We will keep working to make sure that it stays current, that it is relevant, that it is able to respond to the concerns of the day, and also to highlight the concerns of the day. It is very pleasing to see how many of you around the table have read that report. It is great. They are just some of the considerable changes we have made. There have been transformations in funding programs. There have been changes in the reach that we get.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You have cut funding.

Ms M. BOLAND: We are particularly focussed on getting an evidence base to make sure that we see systemic change. It is a considerable difference in approach that Women NSW has made. I think it has actually been a transformation.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Linda, you might like to talk about the Women of the Year awards and how they celebrate women in a public way.

Ms MATTHEWS: Prior to International Women's Day on 8 March this year, the Government's second New South Wales Women of the Year awards were presented to celebrate women's achievements and

contributions in New South Wales. These awards help to highlight the important role that women have to play in their communities as contributors and role models and leaders, and they were great and worthy winners. I guess some of you probably attended this event and saw the pleasure from women in the room who received awards and, indeed, even those who did not and who were just pleased to become a finalist. The people of New South Wales nominated entrants for both the Premier's award and the People's Choice award. The People's Choice award, obviously, was decided by the people of New South Wales.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: And the male champion award.

Ms MATTHEWS: Anyone in New South Wales, including members of the Legislative Council, can nominate women for these categories, and members of the Legislative Assembly nominated a local woman of the year from their electorates. As has already been said, the Government will continue to encourage as many people as possible to nominate for these awards each year.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: A few minutes ago you made reference to domestic and family violence funding. Will you expand on that in respect of how the reforms to the funding will support improved services and lives for victims of domestic and family violence?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As I have said, we are strongly committed to better supporting woman, children and families from the devastating impact of domestic and family violence. We have demonstrated our commitment by overhauling the flawed domestic and family violence funding program that the previous Labor Government had. We have announced \$9.8 million in reforms to support victims, change the behaviour of perpetrators and deliver research that will result in the development of evidence-based policies and services. Women NSW has certainly been working hard to implement these reforms. I invite Maura Boland to outline these a little further.

Ms M. BOLAND: As we have heard already today, in October 2012 the Minister announced a new domestic and family violence funding program for New South Wales, investing \$9.8 million over three years. We all know that prevention and early intervention must be at the forefront if we are to eradicate domestic and family violence and that our responses must be based on best practice. In designing the program, we have dedicated funds to four key areas. The first is building the evidence base to identify best practice through research.

As I have said, we want to invest in what works. There is, frankly, a disappointing research base in this area. It is really difficult to go through the research and say, "Here is our evidence base. This is what we make happen." It is fragmented; it is shallow. We have been working with our colleagues nationally in establishing a national centre for excellence and research into domestic violence. What we are aiming to do through the investment that we make in that national centre for excellence, and also that our colleagues make, is to try to build a coherent picture of what works in domestic and family violence, to understand from the broadest levels of research how that is translated from policy through to how that is translated into practice and how we should be investing our funding. We think that that will give us a significant return.

The second area is changing the behaviour of violent men. We have discussed already the contribution that we have made there. Of greatest concern is the overwhelming levels of violence of men towards women. Women still continue to be the majority of victims of domestic violence. We want to make sure that we are not just focusing on women. There would be no domestic violence if there were only women when we talked about male perpetration of violence against women. We want to make sure there is a focus on men as well. As we have identified, sometimes men are trapped in difficult behaviour patterns; they have learned the wrong behaviour patterns and cannot control them necessarily. Some men want help. We appreciate that may not be the case across the board, but some men absolutely want help. We want to make sure that that is there for them. We are also conscious that friends can be concerned about their mates, and to have a resource there that helps them to have the right way to respond to it can be incredibly useful.

The third area is building the capacity of the sector supporting victims of domestic and family violence. In our consultation with many of the service providers, it is very clear that there has been a significant gap in investment in the existing workforce, particularly the non-government workforce in this area. If we look at some of the previous grants, the very small grants that were given out to organisations, a number of those were to try to design training programs for a single service provider so that their staff were equipped. It was clear from that pattern of investment as well there was a need for a systemic response to this. What we have tried to do in this is to lift that, to get a statewide substantial investment in an existing workforce.

The fourth area is working with prevention experts to fund investment that will produce new and enhanced violence prevention programs. Prevention is central in our thoughts, and we are very conscious that prevention is not just a role of government. It is something that the broader community have demonstrated that they are keen to pick up. We can see that through programs such as White Ribbon. We want to work with the broader community, particularly experts, to try some new approaches, to evaluate them and to understand where we are successful.

This work is still shaping up, but we have already commissioned some specific research that we think will immediately underpin the work in this area. We will continue to support victims, but importantly we want to work to reduce the number of victims by reducing the number of perpetrators. I spoke to the Men's Telephone Counselling and Referral Service. I will hand over to Linda Matthews, who is the Executive Director of Women NSW. She will talk further about the work that we have done.

Ms MATTHEWS: As we said, it will be running seven days a week, 24 hours a day and will start in October. It will have a dedicated toll-free line for male callers. Trained counsellors will provide immediate support and advice and they will be able to refer callers to other services that offer support for long-term behaviour change. The department is also funding the establishment of the first New South Wales men's behaviour change network to help strengthen the capacity of organisations to run long-term behaviour change programs. The network will also provide specialist advice to the Government on this issue.

CHAIR: How will people find out about this new service? How will be it publicised?

Ms MATTHEWS: We will have to do a number of communication activities to ensure that the message gets to the right places, and certainly to the relevant services that refer people.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It should be before the event rather than after. Prevention is better than cure.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Sometimes they do not ask for help until they realise they are about to go to jail.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: They should be able to call before the event rather than after.

Ms PRU GOWARD: There will certainly be that opportunity.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and your team.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.