

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 2

Friday 17 September 2004

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

COMMUNITY SERVICES, AGEING, DISABILITY SERVICES, AND YOUTH

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

Reverend the Hon. G. K. M. Moyes (Chair)

The Hon. A. Chesterfield-Evans
The Hon. A. R. Fazio
The Hon. P. Forsythe

The Hon. E. M. Obeid
The Hon. E. M. Roozendaal
The Hon. J. F. Ryan

PRESENT

The Hon. C. M. Tebbutt, *Minister for Community Services, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Youth*

Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care

Mr B. O'Reilly, *Director-General*
Ms C. Mills, *Deputy Director-General*
Mr S. Mudge, *Chief Financial Officer*

Department of Community Services

Dr N. Shepherd, *Director-General*
Ms D. Rygate, *Executive Director, Office of the Director General*
Mr J. Parisi, *Director Financial Services*

Commission for Children and Young People

Ms G. Calvert, *Commissioner*

Office of the Children's Guardian

Ms L. Mallett, *Children's Guardian*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

CHAIR: I declare this meeting open to the public. Ladies and gentlemen, I welcome you to this public hearing of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2. First, I thank the Minister and departmental officers for attending today. At this meeting the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of Community Services, Ageing, Disability Services, and Youth. For those who have particular interests in the matters concerning Disability Services, the Minister has agreed to deal with those issues first and if you need to leave, you may do so at the end of that questioning, although there may be additional questions on disability services at the end of the hearing. Thank you, Minister, for agreeing to do that.

I point out that in accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcasting of proceedings, only members of the Committee 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 you place on anything that is said before the Committee. There is no provision for members to refer directly to their own staff while at the table. Members and their staff are advised that any messages should be delivered through the attendants on duty. For the benefit of members and Hansard, I ask that departmental officials identify themselves by name, position, department or agency before answering any specific questions.

I declare the proposed expenditure open for examination. Minister, do you wish to start with an opening statement?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, very briefly. I will address my opening comments to the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care [DADHC]. The 2004-05 budget for DADHC is the largest ever, a \$1.3 billion budget. That is a significant increase on the previous year and highlights the Government's commitment to investing additional resources into services for people with a disability and older people. It builds on the directions that the department has been pursuing over the past year in consultation with the disability sector; that is, better integrated and more accessible services that are also viable in the long term.

The fact that the disability service sector is under extreme pressure is no secret to anyone. There is enormous demand and it is something that both State and Commonwealth governments recognise. The budget of \$1.3 billion is an increase in expenditure of \$109 million, or 8.6 per cent, on the 2003-04 budget. There are a range of new initiatives in this year's budget. They will result in additional expenditure of about \$300 million over the next four years and it is a particularly good result when considered in the light of the fact that the State budget was under enormous pressure this year particularly because of cuts by the Federal Government to State funding.

The department's budget for this year comprises allocations to three major programs—\$34.2 million to the Community Resources and Relationships Program. This supports community initiatives to strengthen the independence of older people and people with a disability in the community. The Prevention, Early Intervention and Basic Support Program has an allocation of \$578.4 million, and these funds enable the department to provide support to clients to remain in their own home. The allocation for the Higher Support Needs Program is \$772.7 million. I point out to the Committee that there is a realignment of some expenditure items. This is noted in the budget papers. That has occurred between the three programs over the past year. Last year was the first year we reported against these three program areas. There has been some realignment. That does affect comparisons that can be made at the program level year by year, but the chief financial officer can provide more details or information to the Committee if there are comparisons that need to be made. I will leave my comments there. I have details about particular programs but I am sure that they will come up during questions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The Opposition will now ask questions.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Minister, many people are obviously concerned about the changes to the Adult Training, Learning and Support [ATLAS] and Post School Options programs. Can you explain to the Committee how many people are expected to be exited from the Post School Options Program as a result of the reassessments that have been initiated since you announced your reform plan?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: As the Committee is no doubt aware, and I have reported in the House, the reforms to the Post School Options Program and the ATLAS Program were announced in July. In August I announced some adjustments to that to ensure that the reforms were able to be introduced effectively. These particularly affected Post School Options participants. The adjustments I announced meant that the group of people in that program would not be part of the changes to be introduced from the beginning of next year. But I did make it very clear that Post School Options participants would still have the opportunity to move into employment should they be assessed as having the capacity and be ready to do so. I might just indicate to the Committee that even though many of the participants in the Post School Options Program have been in the program for five to nine years, 16 were successfully transitioned to employment in the last 12 months.

The expectation with regard to the number of Post School Options participants who would move to employment is that it would be a fairly small group because, obviously, if you look at what happened in the last 12 months it was 16 out of a total group of some 1,400. It is certainly not the expectation that it would be a large group. I do not know that I have the actual number we expect but if there is such a number I would be happy to provide it to the Committee. I want to make very clear that Post School Options participants would not be exited from the program if a viable transition plan was not able to be in place. This is not an attempt to move people from Post School Options inappropriately but, rather, saying that just because the Post School Options Program is not part of the broader reforms to ATLAS, it does not mean that the participants should not have the same opportunities to move to employment, should it be within their capacity to do so.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: On 31 August you made a commitment in Parliament that no-one would be forced off the Post School Options Program if they did not have a job to go to. This information appears to contradict some information given to me by constituents. That information was provided to them in a letter from the Director-General of DADHC, who advised that "PSO participants would be informed that if they were assessed as being work ready, they would be exited from the Post School Options Program." Do we understand that to mean something different to what you have said in Parliament?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: No. That is clearly indicating that if a Post School Options participant is assessed as having the capacity to move to employment, then that opportunity should be available. There is a process that is fairly well understood that is common to both Post School Options [PSO] participants and ATLAS participants. When a Post School Options participant is assessed as being able to transition to employment a personalised transition plan will be prepared to ensure that the appropriate level of skills and support is provided to enable the person to succeed.

The transition plan usually involves some partial support from a service provider while they transition to employment. There is a 90-day cooling-off period for participants to leave Post School Options, and that will continue, if the transition is not working or is not sustainable, the participant will be able to return to the Post School Options Program. However, I want to be clear: there is no intention to move people inappropriately from the Post School Options Program to employment if in fact there is no employment opportunity available or sustainable for that participant.

We expect the number to be very small. As I said previously, the Post School Options participants will not be exited if a viable transition plan is not able to be prepared. For example, if the transition plan requires a place in another government program but none is available, then the plan will not go ahead. We are working with the Federal Government—obviously, there is an important intersection between what we do and what the Federal Government does—to ensure that there are sufficient places to meet the needs of both those who make the transition from PSO, as well as those who will transition from the new Transition To Work Program.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: What was the cost of the study undertaken by the University of Wollongong, which studied the cost of providing support to adults with a disability?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I do not have that information available. We will take that on notice and get back to you.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Why did the Government move to implement reforms to ATLAS and Post School Options before the government-funded pilots had reported?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The reforms to ATLAS and Post School Options have been mooted for quite some time, and a consultation process was entered into. A series of working groups was established. Obviously there are some significant issues around ensuring that the reforms can be announced in time to effect the transition before the new school year commences, and that was clearly part of the reasoning for making the announcement when we did.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Can you supply a copy of the \$165,000 consultant's report that was prepared some time ago to review day programs, which was commissioned—these are the words you used last year—"to inform the review of the ATLAS services"? Can you supply a copy of the report to the Committee?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I do not have a copy with me but I will take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Is there any reason why that report cannot be made public?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am aware of the report but I am not aware of any reason why it can or cannot be made public. I said I will take that question on notice and provide an answer to the Committee.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I understand that DADAHC service providers have recently been asked to complete a survey providing information about the current hours of service and anticipated future hours of service under the Community Participation Program. Can you give any information from that survey on what percentage of participants will gain additional hours, maintain their existing hours and receive a reduction in hours?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The survey is part of the process that the department is going through as we establish the new Community Participation Program, as I have indicated on any number of occasions. There has also been an expression of interest process where new providers were able to indicate whether they were interested in providing either the ATLAS program, the Community Participation Program, the Transition to Work Program or the Community Participation Program. They concluded on 3 September and the department is still in the process of assessing those expressions of interest. So in terms of responding to the detail of that question you have asked, that will not be able to be done until that process is completed.

I want to address the issue of hours because I know that it is causing an enormous amount of anxiety, particularly among parents who are troubled by the thought that they may see a reduction in hours for their son or daughter in terms of program support under the new Community Participation Program. I simply reiterate what I have said on numerous occasions: that is not the intention of these reforms. It is the case that at the moment many ATLAS participants have a commitment to a two-year program and it is unlikely that they will transition to employment—maybe never, maybe they will but certainly not within that two-year time frame.

So the underlying rationale of these reforms was always to recognise that having one program that was trying to do everything was not appropriate, that we needed to have two programs that could address the needs of young people who were assessed as having the capacity to move to employment and to have that program very much focused on doing exactly that. That was the original intention of ATLAS, but the difficulty with ATLAS was that, because it took all comers, I think certainly some service providers found it difficult to focus on being able to provide the level of training, support and skill development that they needed to provide to enable young people to transition to employment. That is clearly shown by the outcomes, where between 3 per cent and 6 per cent of young people in ATLAS were moving into employment.

The work done by the department indicates that a higher proportion of young people would be able to move to employment. We are not doing the right thing by those young people if we do not give them every opportunity to move to employment. That is why the transition to employment program will clearly focus on that group of young people. At the same time there is another group of

young people who may not be able to move to employment within two years but maybe with a bit longer they will move to employment, or they may never move to employment. At the moment in the service system that group of people are offered nothing more than a two-year program. Clearly, that is inadequate.

Many parents have indicated to me that they want some certainty, and that is what the Community Participation Program aims to do. It will provide long-term certainty for young people with a disability. There is no time limit on the program. As for the issue around hours, parents are clearly saying that long-term certainty is great but if they get one day a week that is not satisfactory for them. I understand that. It is not in my interests either to see a reduction in hours of support for young people with a disability.

The Community Participation Program is a different program from ATLAS. It is not ATLAS delivered at lesser dollars. It is a different program. It is my view that with the process we have gone into, once we assess all the expressions of interest and once we work with service providers, we will get a good program, a quality program, that will provide appropriate support for young people with a disability. I want to say clearly that it was never an intention of this reform process that there would be a reduction in hours of support for young people.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: You have undertaken to allow people who receive Post School Options to continue to receive the same value in their grant. Will you undertake that those grants will continue to have the same value and that they will be topped up at least to cover increases in inflation in the future?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: As I have indicated, we do not anticipate that there will be changes to the Post School Options Program. I have clearly said that that program has now been quarantined from the reform process. If you are asking me to predict what will happen in future budgets, it is probably difficult for me to do so, but clearly it is not my intention to see that program eroded over time. We will need to look at it. As you well know, decisions around indexation are made on a year-by-year basis. Every year we make decisions around how we allocate indexation, and we will continue to do that.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Is there an intention to erode the value of the program by freezing those funds?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: No. I just said that I did not want to see the value of that program eroded.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: But you make no guarantee that it will not be.

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I can make no guarantee about anything with regard to future budgets. We make that decision with indexation on a year-by-year basis, and that is always the way we have done it.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: What number of existing service providers have indicated that they wish to provide a Community Participation Program?

Ms MILLS: Currently, there up 160 ATLAS providers. All but six of the existing providers have indicated their interest in providing community participation. Some of those who have not sought to participate in community participation have sought to do exclusively Transition to Work bits.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Can the Minister provide the Committee with a breakdown of the staff-participant ratios under the current ATLAS program? Can you give us an indication of what is anticipated under the Community Participation Program?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I do not have that information available, and I am not even sure that it can be provided. However, I am certainly happy to take on notice the issue of staff participation ratios with regard to the ATLAS program. But given that these are delivered by non-government organisations, I am not sure that we would be able to provide that in detail. We will

certainly see what we can make available. With regard to the Community Participation Program, obviously it is not possible to make that information available because, as has already been explained, we are currently in the midst of the assessment of the expressions of interest.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Are you anticipating that one way in which non-government agencies will reduce the cost of providing a Community Participation Program from the current funding for ATLAS is that they will reduce staff-participant ratios?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: As I have indicated previously, it is certainly my expectation that the Community Participation Program will be a different program from the ATLAS program, and it will be person-centred planning. It will be based on person-centred planning but it will also involve a range of both group and individual activities. I think that is appropriate for a community participation program. Certainly, parents to whom I have spoken have given an indication of the types of activities that the children are involved in through the current ATLAS program. And they are many and varied. Frankly, one issue we confront with the ATLAS program is that it is so different across the State; there is no real consistency, and there is not necessarily a capacity to say, "It provides this for this level of funding and you get similar types of outputs or outcomes". It is just not the case, but certainly the Community Participation Program will be a range of group and individual activities.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: As recently as 18 months ago many ATLAS participants were assessed as having high support needs. Some of these have now been informed that they are likely to be considered as having moderate support needs under the Community Participation Program. Can you provide the Committee with a breakdown of the number of people who are currently assessed as having high, medium and low support needs on ATLAS?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: No, I do not have that information available, but it is the case that current ATLAS participants can request a reassessment if they have experienced a significant change in their circumstances since the last assessment.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Are statistics available within the department for the current position?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Not yet, no.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: For what is occurring now, though. Do you keep statistics for what you have been doing to date?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: You mean you want the numbers of individual participants.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Yes. Before anything changes do we have a base level for ground zero as to how people are assessed now before we move into the change so that at least in the future the community will be able to say, "You moved a number of people who were considered to have high support needs into moderate support needs"? I think it is fair that the community should know that. Do we have some statistics that would enable us to know what the situation was before the reforms commenced?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: We will have a look at that. I think the difficulty is that the assessment tool currently being used—it has been used since it was anticipated that we needed to reform the ATLAS program—is a different assessment tool from the basis on which people were previously assessed. The assessment tool that is now being used—I would need to check but I think it has been used since about 2002—is a modified version of what is used in the Home and Community Care Program, and it is not what was previously used to assess ATLAS participants. I think there might be some difficulties in comparing what you are seeking to compare.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: What a surprise!

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is the nature of human services.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Or government. Can you inform the Committee as to the current status of stage one of the devolution program? Last year you advised us that 102 residents would be relocated by December 2003 and a further number would be relocated by the end of this year. Have all of those residents now been relocated or are they expected to be relocated? If not, can you tell us how many will still be waiting by the end of this year?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Government is committed to the devolution of large residential centres. Additional capital funding of \$14.6 million was allocated through the 2003-04 mid-year budget review, and \$15.9 million has been allocated to ensure that additional houses can be purchased to continue the program.

Since the program began in 2000 a total of 207 people have been moved into community-based accommodation options, resulting in the closure of six institutions. These are the Woodstock Centre in Albury, the Cram Foundation Centre in Wollongong, the Jennings Lodge in Parramatta, the Marsden Rehabilitation Centre, York Road and the John Williams Respite Centre. The department expects to relocate approximately 100 residents by the end of this year, with the remainder due to relocate during 2005 and up to the end of 2006.

To date, more than 50 properties have been purchased for the devolution program since its commencement. A devolution expert working group has also been established to provide advice on the closure process. The group includes academic experts, representatives from the community and non-government service providers. The group will act as a consultative mechanism on service model development and assist with addressing serious impediments to the progress of the program. In fact there is delay in the program, as there has been throughout stage one. The devolution expert working group has been briefed on the delay and the reasons for the delay. Some of these matters now are beyond the department's control, including things like development applications going through council to allow houses to be modified, and those sorts of issues. It is my expectation the process we now have in place for devolution, which I think I reported on at the last estimates committee, will ensure that delays should be minimised.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: As I understand it, stage one was due to be completed this year, was it not?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The end of 2004.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: How much of it will not be by December? Sadly, every time we get figures it is difficult to compare them. The most relevant issue is how many are left over. Are you able to tell the Committee how many will not have been involved out of stage one by the end of this year?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, I can, I think. There are 201 people yet to be moved across all the institutions. Can we come back to you on that? Two particular institutions will cause us difficulty in completing stage one, and they are Lachlan and Grosvenor. The expectation is that the majority of relocation should take place throughout the rest of 2004 and 2005. There are 202 more people to be devolved.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: While I am on the issue of devolution, are you planning anything with regard to stage two? In other words, is stage two out of planning yet?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: No, we are still planning stage two. Obviously, completing stage one is an important priority issue but we have started to consider the planning for stage two.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Is there going to be an announcement about stage two before stage one is completed? Given that obviously there will be things that are beyond your capacity to control in stage one, it might make sense to get started on stage two?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: It would certainly be my hope that there will be some announcement about stage two before we complete stage one, but stage one completion will be the priority.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Minister, with the people currently in ATLAS who cannot get long-term work, they will go to a maximum of \$13,500, will they not, as against programs which are currently giving them between \$19,000 and \$21,000?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The \$12,500 is the average, and the second figure you quoted I do not believe is correct. The average for the ATLAS participants is currently \$16,500.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The PSOs or community access programs get the \$19,000 to \$21,000, do they?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is that not discriminatory, then?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: PSO was always funded in a different way from the ATLAS program and had a higher level of funding even before this reform process.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Even taking the \$16,000 figure, that is still quite a large drop?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, but as I have indicated previously, the Community Participation Program is not the ATLAS program delivered at a cheaper rate. It is a new program. The ATLAS program is probably far more analogous to the Transition to Work Program. ATLAS was established as a transition to work program. It did not effectively operate like that because, as I indicated previously, it was the only program available for school leavers and therefore everyone went into it. It was established as a transition to work program and it is probably more analogous to the new Transition To Work Program, which will commence next year, and is funded at approximately the same level as the current ATLAS program.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You have had an EOI process, Minister. Of the people involved in the tendering for that, how many have said they can deliver the same services?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: We cannot answer that at this stage. The tender panel started assessing the expressions of interest at the beginning of this week, so it would not be proper to provide that sort of information halfway through the assessment process. But even if it was proper, we could not do it because I do not have it.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Have any of them said they would have to reduce hours and service quality because of the funding changes?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I do not have that level of information before me. The idea would be that the tender panel will deal with the applications and then it will provide a report to me. I am not expecting to receive that until the end of September.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Which services participated in the pilot program for the reform process?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Can we take that on notice?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Surely. Do the pilots demonstrate that the funding cuts still allow the same quality with the new funding formula?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The pilots that were funded were Transition to Employment pilots. They were paid basically at a rate equivalent to that at which the ATLAS program is currently funded. My understanding—and I have met with some of the pilot providers—is that they are having good outcomes in terms of transition of young people into employment.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So there is hard dough, and they are likely to get to employ them better under this new program?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is correct.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The pilots were a success?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I do not have an evaluation of them at this stage, but certainly the information I have from meeting with the pilot providers is that that is the case. The director-general has had a bit more to do with that, so he might like to comment further.

Mr O'REILLY: That is right. The pilots have proved to be very successful. We would be expecting under the new arrangements for Transition to Work to build on the improvement that has already occurred.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Were these pilots available before this new program was put together?

Mr O'REILLY: They were piloted over about the past 12 months, and we have invited those same people to also submit a tender for the new Transition to Work Program.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That is not quite what I asked you. Were the pilot results available before you put this new program together?

Mr O'REILLY: Only in the broadest outcomes stage, so far as how many people were transitioning to work from those pilot program, and they were very successful.

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: But they are still ongoing, that is the point.

Mr O'REILLY: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The point is, if you do not know it is going to work, why would you bring in a new program?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The rationale underneath the reforms that commence from next year was that the pilots were part of that process. But there were a number of other parts that came together to guide the department, including working groups that it established. There were a number of matters that the department based the reform process on, and it was the case that the pilots had been under way for sometime.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Isn't the key problem that you are reverting to funding institutions rather than individuals?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is an issue that has come up quite a lot. What we have indicated with both the Transition to Work and the Community Participation programs is that the funding would be given to service providers to provide programs for a certain number of participants rather than individualised funding. While I can appreciate the concern and the issues that people have raised around individual funding, I have never been fully convinced that individual funding is always the best way to develop service capacity in any area, and certainly individual funding seems to be much more common in disability services—and I understand historically why that is the case—than it is in some other areas of service provision.

The concern with individual funding is that service providers have no certainty from year to year. They find it very difficult to employ permanent staff because they do not know if they are going to have the same number of participants. Service providers find it difficult to build capacity because, again, they do not know what they will be providing from year to year. This issue was expressed throughout the consultation process with regard to reforming ATLAS. And although the concern about moving to block funding is that individuals lose some capacity to influence and choose the program and some capacity to control the service quality, I think the way to influence service quality

is through policy, contracting arrangements and monitoring rather than necessarily giving individual funding to people and expecting them to do all that themselves.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Some 1,635 participants in the ATLAS program will have less funding though, is that not right?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: No. I think you are comparing apples and oranges. There are a series of different groups. Obviously there are school leavers who are currently ATLAS participants and who will be part of the two new programs. There are current ATLAS participants who had only one year of ATLAS who will be part of the new programs and then there are ATLAS participants who had two years or more, whose expectation would not necessarily be that they were going to continue to have an ongoing program, because ATLAS has been a two-year, time-limited program. I think you need to be conscious of that fact—and I need to make this clear—that community participation is a different program and it does not have that time limit on it. There is no reduction in overall funding for programs for school leavers with a disability. In fact, the overall funding increases year by year to provide a range of programs.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is there a commitment, then, to increase that in proportion to the number of new people coming into the program?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: It increases year by year. If there were a dramatic and unanticipated spike in the number of people coming into the program, I would envisage that that would be something I would need to talk to the Treasurer about. But the expectation is that growth in funding will address the growth in numbers that are expected.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: On a per capita basis? In other words, the growth in funding will be directly proportionate to the number of people going into the programs?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is difficult to predict, because we do not know from year to year exactly what number will be in the program. But yes, there needs to be a correlation between the number of people going into the program and the amount of funding that is provided. If we find that the number of people is significantly greater than what was predicted, that is something I would obviously need to talk to the Treasurer about. And if we found the number of people was significantly less, then the Treasurer would probably come to talk to me. In 2003-04 we increased funding for ATLAS in the mid year review, and one of the reasons for that was an increase in the number of people for whom we had to provide a program—that is, an increase that was not expected.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: People currently in the Post School Options Program, which I understand is 1,419, will have their funding cut even if there are no Commonwealth-funded places available, will they not—if they are not ready?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I have already answered that. If there is no position for them to go to, they will not be transitioned out of the Post School Options Program. The expectation is that only a very small number of people will move from the Post School Options Program to employment.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Yes, I think that is what you said in the House was the problem with the program, did you not?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I think that was more of a problem with ATLAS because ATLAS was premised on the basis of achieving transition to employment, whereas the Post School Options Program was not premised in the same way.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In Budget Paper No. 3 you said an extra \$32 million is being allocated to the ATLAS program over the next four years but it only details expenditure totalling \$54.1 million. Which is the correct figure of those two?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is \$54.1 million. The information I have is that the \$32 million figure appears to be a typographical error. It is only in the printed version of Budget Paper No. 3. The web version shows \$54.1 million. So, \$54.1 million is the correct figure.

CHAIR: Minister, I want to ask you about a reference in the financials to "an additional \$3 million to support individuals with a disability who have been displaced due to unplanned boarding house closures". On average, how many people are displaced by unplanned boarding house closures? What specific ways will such disabled people be helped during the coming year?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The boarding house reform program was announced in 1998. It has been an ongoing program whereby individuals who have high support needs, and for whom boarding house accommodation is considered inappropriate, to be relocated into more appropriate supported accommodation. Part of that program has also catered for unexpected boarding house closures. It is that which you refer to. The recurrent budget for boarding house residents will increase from \$29.7 million in 2003-04 to \$34.2 million in 2004-05. It is the \$3 million recurrent funding that is being provided for relocation because of closures that we could not anticipate. In terms of the actual numbers, 440 new community-based accommodation and support places for residents with high support needs have been provided throughout the reform program. The number of licensed residential centres has decreased from 126 in 1998 to 59 in 2004. We do not have an anticipated figure for 2004-05.

CHAIR: It is there as a contingency?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes. In 2003-04 three boarding houses closed, which required support to be provided for 35 residents. It is probably reasonable to base what would happen in 2004-05 on that figure. The boarding house sector is obviously under pressure for a range of reasons.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: What is the Government doing to improve respite services across the State?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Respite services are obviously critical for families who are caring for a child or an adult with a disability because they provide the opportunity for carers to take a well-earned break. Importantly, they also provide the opportunity for the person with the disability to experience something that is different and outside their normal range of experiences. We provide centre-based and/or flexible respite in recognition that parents often want a combination of both. Sometimes one suits more than the other.

The Government's investment in respite services in 2004-05 is \$136.7 million. That comprises approximately \$66 million in the Disability Services Program and \$71 million in the Home and Community Care Program. This level of respite funding has doubled since 1996. In the 2003-04 budget the Government announced that it would provide an additional \$11.2 million over four years for respite, particularly targeted at carers of young people with a disability. That was rolled out in 2003-04 and \$3.2 million recurrent will be available this year.

The additional funding allowed an extra 400 respite packages to be delivered from January 2004. In total, the department funds over 230 organisations to deliver respite services. In 2003-04 Home And Community Care respite services assisted about 19,800 frail older people and younger people with a disability. Through the Disability Services Program in 2003-04, 1,560 clients accessed respite directly provided by DADHC and 2,923 clients accessed respite through non-government service providers, which could have included a range of both centre-based and flexible respite.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Minister, I will ask you a question that has been handed to me by one of the people who are interested in today's hearing. It is a fair question to ask. The question posed is: Post School Options was not a transition-to-work program in 1994. It was funded at \$13,500 for moderate support needs and \$16,500 for high support needs. It was intended to provide a community program to maintain and develop the independence of people with disabilities for 30 hours per week. How is it now considered reasonable to provide \$9,000 and \$13,500 to provide almost a similar service 10 years later for the program you are calling community participation?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: As I have indicated, the funding levels that have been established for the community participation program have been set through looking at what other States are doing as well as some work that the department had done. If the expression of interest process demonstrates that service providers cannot deliver what we are asking for—and there are six

criteria they need to meet—clearly that is something we will have to look at. Until that expression of interest process is completed, it is difficult to comment with any real informed knowledge about what the outcomes will be. As I have always indicated, I recognise the Post Schools Options Program was not a transition-to-employment program. I have made that very clear. The Adult Training, Learning and Support [ATLAS] program was a transition-to-employment program. We are seeking now to provide two new programs and not seeking to replace the Post Schools Options Program.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: You would understand that some people feel the two programs in description and name are similar, and it seems inconceivable that 10 years later it would be cheaper to provide the same service?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is certainly my understanding—and obviously it is going back before my time—and from information I have gained from talking to service providers that the Post Schools Options Program was set up as a fairly narrowly cast program. If you look at the early numbers in that program they were very small. Maybe I have got the wrong information, but that is certainly my understanding of what the Post Schools Options Program was. It was available certainly not for all school leavers but for school leavers who had very high support needs.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Minister, if I may take up an issue we started last year. You may remember we almost had a shouting match about revealing regional budgets. In the end you agreed, thankfully, to provide the Committee with information about the value of budgets for each of the regions. However, the figures you gave, I would respectfully state, did not mean much because you did not tell the Committee the services that were included and those that were not. I imagine by now that the process of doing regional budgets is much more sophisticated than it was last year. Is it possible to give the Committee statistics on the budgets allocated to each of the regions, and details as to what is now funded on a regional basis and what is funded centrally?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I will check whether the director-general has that information or whether we should take it on notice in order to provide a more detailed response.

Mr O'REILLY: Yes, we can. I am pleased to say that we have broken it down a lot further, so it would be obviously far more meaningful to someone who is not working in the department. We would be pleased to table that following this meeting.

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: We will take it on notice and make it available. To go back, I missed providing this information in regard to devolution: The department expects to relocate approximately 100 residents by the end of this year and the remainder are due to relocate during 2005 and up to 2006.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: May I express one other frustration? In terms of the budget process you are probably aware that about a month before this process started I asked a number of questions on notice about the budget papers. They were largely to find out what the budget papers meant, and I am greatly informed by the information I received. However, one of the continuing frustrations is the paucity of output data given by your department. I know this issue was raised at a stakeholders' meeting. For example, the annual report from the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care has almost no information on output data. The only output data we get is the information contained in the budget papers, and the requirement for accuracy in the budget papers is not nearly as strict as in annual reports.

Are you able to give the Committee output data for Ageing and Disability Services that will inform us about the number of people who receive the service access system [SAS] packages, the number of people who apply for SAS and are unsuccessful, the number of respite beds, the number of supported accommodation places, the number of people involved in community services teams and therapy services, and the number of people receiving attendant care. I am constantly asked for that sort of output data. Also, if at all possible, would you provide the output data by region? That information would also be useful. It is not only the Opposition who wants these statistics. The Council of Social Services of New South Wales and other advocacy groups want to know what is on offer in their region so they can bargain with their local regional director. Also, if they know how many SAS positions are available, they are able to participate in the lobbying process, whether with politicians or the local director, for more positions.

Is it at all possible to upgrade the level of data provided to the community, given that by any stretch of the imagination the material that is available in the annual report largely repeats the figures in the budget? Announcements made by the Minister are always in terms of how much extra money is being spent on a program. We get very little information about what the extra money will produce, or whether it is indexation, or the result of a Commonwealth government grant. We do not know. Is there any way of providing such information in a more structured fashion?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I will make some comments and the director-general may want to add to them. In terms of the individual questions you have asked, no doubt we could provide the information for many of those items. It is a reasonable point. The department is working to improve the way it reports outcomes. It is hampered somewhat by the capacity to collect data because of the nature of the service system: there are a lot of smaller providers, and there is interaction between the State and the Commonwealth.

We have relied on a minimum data set, which is now being improved. That is a good thing because at any one point in time it has been a snapshot and does not necessarily mean you can usefully compare what is provided from one year to the next. We are looking at how we can improve reporting and try to get a better alignment between the programs that are outlined in the budget papers, the outcomes for those programs, and the information provided in the annual report.

Mr O'REILLY: I can understand the frustration because as they move three agencies into one we have a whole range of IT systems that do not necessarily talk to each other. We have been allocated \$11.25 million over two years to select and implement a client information system. The current systems are not consistently used across the department. They do not provide the department with the ability to monitor service activity, outcomes, and outputs effectively. With respect to the next annual report, we knew we had to do something to be able to collect this data because it is critically important for our budgetary process as well. We will be able to provide a lot more meaningful data in the next annual report. The new client information system is scheduled for implementation in April 2005. It will help cut down all that manual collection and will benefit the coming annual report.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I would like one piece of data that would be helpful, Would you inform the Committee of the number of blocked respite beds and the number of beds that are held by people more permanently, I think more than 28 days?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: There are 33 respite beds currently blocked or occupied long-term, which is 8 per cent of the total number of respite beds funded and provided by the department.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Last year you gave us that figure by region. At a later time would you provide that figure by region?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, we will certainly take that on notice.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The budget estimates intent is to provide ATLAS to 588 new school leavers. Is the Minister aware that at meetings being held by DADAHC, parents are being informed it will provide for 824 school leavers this year. Which is the correct figure?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The department expects that the take-up for ATLAS will be 588. That is based on previous outcomes. The information I have is that the registration of 2004 school leavers with a disability concluded in June with 824 school leavers applying to participate in the transition-to-work or community participation program. Based on historical assessment outcomes it is anticipated that 588 2004 school leavers will commence participation in 2005, while the remainder are expected to proceed directly to employment, as in previous years.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That figure is based on an assessment of the number of people who will need the programs?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is right.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The others will not?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That is their choice? It is not an availability problem?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: No, the department undertakes an assessment. If people are assessed as ineligible, they have the opportunity to request a review.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Will there be enough programs for all the people who will want them?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is not an issue of lack of capacity. The issue is the assessment of what is appropriate for the individual.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The budget papers also state that a further \$12.4 million will be allocated to support the ATLAS program in 2004-05, and it is estimated that that funding will provide support to 588 new school leavers with 13 per cent of existing participants finding employment. Can you guarantee those outputs? If 13 per cent of the participants are not placed in jobs, obviously that outcome will not be achieved.

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I cannot give a guarantee because they are the expected outcomes. However, we believe that expectation is appropriate given the assessments that have been done. I can confirm that, to the best of my knowledge, it is achievable.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Many people who are getting 30 hours of funding at the moment are not convinced that the new system will be able to deliver the same level of service. Minister, you have undertaken extensive consultation with those involved in the ATLAS and PSO programs and you have discussed the issues with families and carers. Have you taken their concerns into consideration? If they are not happy, will the reforms be implemented anyway?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The reform process is not intended to reduce the access hours. The assessment of the expressions of interest [EOI] is based on six criteria, one of which is the maintenance of support hours. I have made it very clear that I will closely monitor the EOI process, particularly in relation to the hours of support that can be provided to individuals and other issues such as the type of programs offered, that quality is maintained and that planning is person centred. I have clearly indicated to parents that I take their concerns seriously and that I will ensure that we address the issues that they have raised.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If they are unhappy, will you not go ahead?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I cannot say that. Some people may be happy and others may not. I do not want to see a reduction in hours because I know that that will have an impact on the service system in other ways. It will mean that people will require more respite or supported accommodation. Clearly, no-one sees that as a desirable outcome. I do not believe that that will be the result of the reform process. I will closely examine the EOI process and will work with service providers to ensure we get a program that meets the needs of young people with a disability when they leave school, regardless of whether they transition to employment or need longer-term support.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Have you addressed the effect of the program of appliances for disabled people [PADP] on those in institutions? They appear to have faced more problems than disabled people in the community. What have you done to address that issue?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: As a general rule, the department is responsible for funding the aids and appliances for residents in the large institutions and group homes that it operates, whereas NSW Health is responsible for funding the program for other people.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It appears that the waiting times for people in institutions and group homes is longer than the waiting list for people in the community who obtain funding from NSW Health. Are you aware of that and what are you doing about it?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: A departmental review revealed that not all regional directors and managers were aware of their responsibility to fund aids and appliances for residents in facilities operated by the department. The matter has now been clarified and regional directors and managers should have a common understanding of their responsibilities.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That is the input. What output do you anticipate?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am anticipating that the regional directors and managers will take on board their responsibility. It has been made clear to them.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you measure the output against the waiting times?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am not aware that we record waiting times. The regional directors and managers will be aware of the needs of people in the institutions and group homes for which the department has responsibility.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It appears that they were not.

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: They will be now that we have been through this process to make them aware. They would have been aware of the needs of the people in the department's group homes and institutions, but they were not aware it was their responsibility to meet that need. They are aware of that now.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Presumably it would be relatively easy to record when aids and appliances are ordered or requested and when they are delivered. That is an output. As the Hon. John Ryan said, we are given a great deal of information about how much money has been allocated—that is, inputs—but we often do not get information about outputs.

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am happy to provide more information about how the department will be better able to meet the needs of people in DADHC-operated facilities who require appliances.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But will you monitor the effects that your words have had on the regional directors and managers?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is regional directors' and managers' responsibility and that has been made very clear. I will seek an update for the Committee and that will help me to monitor how it is proceeding.

CHAIR: Minister, a member of the public present today has asked me to ask you a question. How does the department intend to cope with the large increase in school leavers—approximately 1,200 to 1,400—who are expected to apply for ATLAS program assistance in the next five years?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The aim of the two programs is to provide young people leaving school with an appropriate program that responds to their needs and capacity. The department will ensure that young people who can transition directly into employment do so. We will work with the Department of Education and Training to ensure that its officers are aware of the options available to young people with a disability. I cannot confirm the figures that have been quoted: they are higher than the figures I have seen. We believe that the two programs will meet the needs of young people with a disability when they leave school. They will be in addition to other options available in the community.

CHAIR: The Committee will now examine the expenditure for the Department of Community Services, the Commission for Children and Young People and the Office of the Children's Guardian and so on.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: What action has the Government taken to audit case files for children and young people?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: This is an important question because, as I am sure honourable members are aware, resolving the appropriate role for the Children's Guardian under the Children's and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act has been a lengthy process. I am pleased to say that significant progress has been made, in part because of the work the ministerial advisory committee has undertaken for me. The Office of the Children's Guardian [OCG] has commenced case file audits, which are an important means of monitoring agencies' compliance with legislative responsibilities and quality standards in out-of-home care. The Children's Guardian case file audit is a significant tool that will improve the out-of-home care system for children and young people who are not able to live with their families.

The Children's Guardian commenced phase one of an annual audit of case files of children and young people in July 2004. The findings from phase one will provide specific benchmark data relating to quality and standards in the out-of-home care sector that will be used for later year comparisons. Audit reports will identify the improvements required at an individual agency level, obtain trend data across the out-of-home care population and identify areas for further research and policy development. The priority for 2004-05 is to audit the files of children and young people on final court orders under the sole parental responsibility of the Minister. This audit will provide an indication of current practice and identify areas for improvement. It will include children and young people for whom permanency planning is a high priority and should be progressed.

The OCG has already completed 74 per cent of its annual case file audit across the non-government sector, for-profit agencies and the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. That involves 337 out of a total of 457 case files. By December 2004, the OCG will have visited a total of 68 different sites to audit the files of 457 children and young people. These files are part of an annual audit of case files of more than 700 children and young people in out-of-home care. At the completion of an audit, the Children's Guardian sends a draft report for comment to the agency. The agency has 28 days to respond and responses may be incorporated in an agency's quality improvement plan. Of course, if immediate safety concerns for a child or young person are raised during an audit, staff at the OCG report those matters to the Department of Community Services Helpline. Audits of 275 case files in the department will commence in 2005. The Children's Guardian will report to Parliament in 2005 on the audit findings. In 2005 the Children's Guardian will report to Parliament on the audit findings. That is some information for the Committee about how the audit process is proceeding with regard to the Children's Guardian and children in out-of-home care.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Mr Shepherd, what is meant by "contingency staff" in the DOCS Helpline, and under what circumstances are they employed?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Are you referring to a particular part of the budget?

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: The DOCS Helpline employs what is known as contingency staff. What are contingency staff, and what are the circumstances under which they are employed?

Dr SHEPHERD: I am not familiar with that term. We have staff employed at the helpline, over and above the establishment level of the helpline, to provide us with a cushion of trained caseworkers who would then be available to take up any vacancies that occur in the helpline. That enables us to keep the helpline almost fully staffed. If you are referring to something else, you will have to be more specific.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I am referring to staff who are drawn from other sections of the portfolio to staff the helpline during periods such as weekends. Are they known as contingency staff?

Dr SHEPHERD: As I said, I am not familiar with the use of that term. However, at various times during the introduction of the new client information system we did draw staff from some

community service centres [CSCs] to deal with the backlog of faxes that accumulated at the time of the introduction of the new system. It is on the public record that the call wait times expanded, as you would expect them to do with the introduction of a new computer system, and at that time the increase in the use of faxes meant that we needed to bring some staff in on overtime from CSCs on weekends in order to process the backlog of faxes. That work has now well and truly concluded, and as far as I am aware we are not drawing staff in for that purpose.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: The Minister or Mr Shepherd might be aware that some time ago I asked for details regarding additional caseworker positions. Given that the Government has been announcing additional caseworker positions, one of the obvious questions that arises is: How many unfilled positions are there within DOCS? Not one of the DOCS offices I have visited has told me that it does not have its full establishment of caseworkers. Are you able to inform the Committee how many unfilled caseworker positions there are within the DOCS portfolio, and the number of caseworkers who are on long-term leave because of stress or some other reason?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is my recollection from the question you asked that you were seeking information to identify whether the commitments regarding additional caseworkers were being met. Certainly it is a matter that I will be reporting on to the Committee every year. I think the information that was provided to you at that time clearly indicated that in June 2003 there were 1,202 caseworkers and that as at 17 June 2004 there were 173 more caseworkers than that. So we have clearly met our commitment to recruit 150 caseworkers as part of the overall rollout of 875 caseworkers over five years. Obviously you will be monitoring the situation to make sure that by this time next year that number has gone up by another 150. The figure I have given you is not just the increase in caseworkers but the overall increase. The director-general may have more information about vacancy rates.

Dr SHEPHERD: No, I cannot give you a precise community service centre by community service centre vacancy list, because that will change on a weekly basis. There is another issue here, and that is the full caseworker establishment of the department, which we are in the process of finalising. I think I am on record, in either this Committee or another standing committee, as pointing out that we had a significant problem with the computer system that was designed to deal with the establishment of the organisation before I came to the organisation. It has been difficult to get the number of positions on that system reconciled with the number of people that the organisation actually pays.

We have now completed that audit and we have a new human resources computer system as of this week, so from basically the beginning of next week we will be in a position to manage the vacancies accurately and tightly. But at the moment I cannot tell you exactly how many caseworker positions are vacant. What I can tell you is that we are filling the vacancies in the properly established positions as they arise. That is why there has been an increase on last year's caseworkers of 170-odd, rather than the 150 that were in the original package. We will continue to do that in this financial year, and I anticipate we will recruit well above the 150 caseworkers for this year because that is my objective. It is not what I am committed to, but I intend to get beyond 150.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Will you provide to the Committee on notice details of your establishment currently, as well as details of what the establishment of caseworkers should be and the number of unfilled vacancies?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The information that has been provided to you sets out the details for June 2002, June 2003—

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I do not know whether those figures relate to people or positions. The Government says there will be 875 more caseworker positions. I want to know what the final number of positions will be.

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is understood. Obviously, we are happy to provide that information. The director-general has made that clear and, as I have indicated, I will be reporting each year to this Committee how we are tracking against our commitment with regard to the 875 caseworkers. I simply point out that the figures that have been provided to you go back to 2002, and they allow you to measure the net increases.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I still think that unfilled vacancies would undermine that.

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: And we will provide that information.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Is it a fact that at Broken Hill six of the eight caseworker positions are unfilled, and as a result of not being able to fill vacancies the Wilcannia CSC has been closed for a period of four years?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I do not have information about Broken Hill, but I will take the question on notice. As we have explained on a number of occasions, filling caseworker positions in the western part of the State is extremely difficult. I am happy to take on notice your request with regard to Broken Hill and the broader issue of vacancy rates.

Dr SHEPHERD: I can tell you that, as far as I am aware—and I did visit the Broken Hill staff about a week and a half ago—six of the eight caseworker positions are not vacant, because I saw a lot more caseworkers than that. It has been difficult to recruit caseworkers to Wilcannia. That is not for want of trying. We provide a regular service from Broken Hill to Wilcannia to deal with any urgent and ongoing matters, and at the moment that is the best we can do with Wilcannia.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: With regard to the revenue you have collected from the increased fees for intercountry adoptions, the budget papers indicate that next year grants and contributions will increase by about \$1.5 million. Is that the amount you anticipate collecting as a result of the new fees?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The amount we anticipated collecting as a result of the new fees was \$1 million.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 1, page 4-28, shows that grants and contributions were supposed to be increased from \$543,000 to \$2,061,000.

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I will ask the chief financial officer whether he has any information on that. It would appear that you are looking at a figure that would take into account more than just intercountry adoptions. The chief financial officer will check the figures and we will advise you further.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: The newly introduced fees are currently higher than the fees in any other State, including South Australia, which has a private agency. Can you explain why, even on a cost-recovery basis, adoption processing is so much more expensive in New South Wales than it is in any other State?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The new fee structure for intercountry adoptions took effect from 1 July 2004. Victoria has been recovering about 70 per cent of the cost of providing intercountry adoption services for more than 10 years, and for the past 10 years the sole intercountry adoption service provider in South Australia has been operating without government funding under a fee-for-service arrangement. In New South Wales there has not been a fee increase for a significant period. The New South Wales fee is slightly higher than the fees in South Australia and Victoria, for reasons that include the fact that fees paid to private social workers are significantly higher in New South Wales than they are in other States, because DOCS pays the fee recommended by the Australian Association of Social Workers.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Minister, has any instruction recently been given to the Department of Community Services to find efficiency gains within the department? If so, could you give the Committee details of that instruction?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Are you referring to directions from me?

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: From either you or the director-general.

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am not aware of any particular direction, other than as a result of the funding cuts imposed on the State Government by the Federal Government. As part of the

2004-05 State budget, all agencies, with the exception of two, were required to find efficiency savings, and the Department of Community Services was included in that. However, our front-line services were excluded. The reduction was only on our administrative central office budget rather than the overall budget, so front-line services were protected from that. I think any agency—and I would expect this of the agencies that I have responsibility for—would be striving to do things in the most efficient and effective way possible. It is taxpayer funding, and no one wants to see money being wasted. Without your being more specific, it is impossible to respond in any more detail.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: You referred to a specific program within the department. Are you able to give the Committee details of what the value of those efficiency gains was meant to be and how they were achieved?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I did not refer to a specific program. I clearly indicated—

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: You said that all agencies have been asked to find efficiencies. What efficiencies were you expected to find?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I think it was 0.2 per cent.

Dr SHEPHERD: Perhaps I should take this on notice. Off the top of my head, it is not a large number, when you take into account the DOCS budget. It excluded the bulk of the organisation in its calculation, because it did not apply to the front-line services. When almost 80 per cent of DOCS employees and services are in the front line, it means that very little of it was applied to the organisation as a whole. We came out of it much lighter than many other agencies.

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I point out that the overall budget for the department has grown by 12 per cent from 2003-04 to 2004-05.

CHAIR: Dr Shepherd, I would like to ask you about your procedures. You have an increase in the number of children going into out-of-home care, a 7 per cent increase to about 16,000.

Dr SHEPHERD: The number in out-of-home care is about 10,000, not 16,000.

CHAIR: Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 1, states at page 4-3, "The number of children and young people receiving out-of-home care services is also increasing with an estimated total of 16,000".

Dr SHEPHERD: We must be talking about different figures. The end of year figure, which is what I am talking about, was 10,059 as at 30 June.

CHAIR: You might look at page 4-3 and find out why that number is different. I am reading from the Budget Estimates, which states, "The number of children and young people receiving out-of-home care services is also increasing with an estimated total of 16,000 in 2004-05, a 7 per cent increase." Leaving that exact number to one side, allowing for the fact that there is also an increasing complexity in high-needs children, and allowing for the fact that the costs are increasing in this area, you have indicated that you are developing some new service delivery models for those children to mitigate against the increasing costs, without decreasing the standards of care. That is a miracle issue and I am wondering how you are doing it.

Dr SHEPHERD: There is a number of strategies being applied to improve the service that the department provides in out-of-home care, and they vary from increasing the range of services so that children can be much more accurately placed with the level of service that they require, to increasing the regional capacity of those services, to improving the assessment models that we use, particularly with the high-needs children, to place them more accurately and with a better range of services.

CHAIR: So it is not really new services provided, it is more accurate classification of the children?

Dr SHEPHERD: That is part of it. More appropriate classification of children is one element of it. In other words, increasing the number of services that are available, the number of placements that are available within particular types, especially for high-needs children and for the group of children that sit immediately underneath the high-needs children—who may become high-needs children if they are not appropriately looked after; and then, obviously, also improving the range of foster care services for children who can live within the general foster care system.

The key parts of the financial control that you mentioned at the beginning of your question are associated with the services to the high-needs children and to the group immediately underneath them. What we have done there is increased the number of caseworkers who are specifically dealing with high-needs children. We have already appointed 36, and we will appoint another 14 this year to deal just with that group of children. They are in addition to the caseworkers we already had dealing with that group of children. We have conducted an expression of interest process with the non-government sector to try to get a range of services in place that meet the requirements of these children, so that we will have an appropriate number of placements, which is around 200 to 220 places in the regional centres where they are required, with the capacity to deliver the full range of services that these kids require.

CHAIR: Do you see any hope that the numbers of children with high and complex needs moving into out-of-home care will decrease?

Dr SHEPHERD: In the longer term, yes. In the short term, yes, because we will better manage the group we have got, and some of the children who are in those very high needs, high cost placements, do not need to be there and could be managed in professional foster care. We will move some of those into more appropriate placements as we get professional foster care models in place, both through the department and through the non-government sector. We will use both systems.

CHAIR: Hopefully a bit of light at the beginning of the tunnel?

Dr SHEPHERD: Yes. We have finished focusing on the high-needs end of this, and we are about to start on the 400 or so that sit immediately underneath them and will apply the same principles to them. With any luck we should start to make significant inroads into that group of children as well. The objective is not just to cost-cut; the objective is to improve the quality of the services to these kids, because you would have to say that at the moment the high-needs kids might be costing a lot of money but the quality of the service that get is of doubtful value.

CHAIR: I wish you well in that.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Minister, given the increasing need to support young people, particularly in extended hours service, why is there a decrease in funding for youth projects and adolescent support in the budget on page 4-22?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Just to make it clear, that particular line item that you have referred to does not encompass out-of-home care programs for young people with very high-support needs that we have just been talking about. It covers a range of community service grants programs for 320 services for young people. My understanding of why there is a slight decrease between the 2003-04 budget and the 2004-05 budget is that there have been two drug summit funded youth projects which have been completed. So they are not reflected in the 2004-05 budget.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If you are to do good preventive work surely there should be more community-based projects? I note you have increased the number of supported assistance programs [SAP]. That is a combination; these other ones are, presumably, more community-based. Do you not need support at that level too?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, but what is not reflected in that particular line item, as you would be aware, is that there is a range of new programs—not new programs but they will be new to the Department of Community Services—that have now come across to form part of a communities division from both the Premier's Department and also from the Office of Children and Young People. They do a lot of other things for young people; they provide a lot of support for young people. So the programs that are available to support young people are not just reflected in that one

line item in the budget that you have referred to. Of course, under the Community Solutions Program we have got things such as the Youth Partnership with Arabic Speaking Communities; there is the Youth Partnership with Pacific Islander Communities; the Cabramatta Project; the Canterbury-Bankstown Place Project; all working with young people in those particular areas or of those particular ethnicities.

There is also the Better Futures Program, which is currently available in six areas, but from 2005-06 it will roll out to another four areas. That program is working specifically with young people between the ages of 9 and 18 and at the moment it is operating on the Central Coast, in Broken Hill, Menai, Cessnock and Penrith in the Nepean area. So there is a range of different programs that are available to support young people. The line item that is in the budget is just one of many programs that are available to support young people.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So have these other programs in this budget escaped my attention or are they somewhere else?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: They are reflected in this budget, but they are new programs coming across to the department. The community development and area assistance scheme, the total combined funding that is coming across to the Department is \$32.4 million for all of these programs, but that is not all for young people. Some of these programs work with other groups in the community as well. I forgot to mention the area assistance scheme, but that is one of the programs that will also transfer to DOCS under the new communities division.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What is the average level of DOCS funding to a one-unit preschool?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am not sure I completely understand that question. What exactly are you seeking?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What is the level of DOCS funding to preschools, and how does it compare with the level of funding of the Department of Education and Training to preschools?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Department of Community Services provides a funding contribution of approximately \$69 million towards the operating costs of some 800 community-based preschools in New South Wales. It includes funding to assist preschools to provide education programs, to support children with additional needs and affordability funding to improve access for low-income families. On average, DOCS contributions cover about 40 per cent of the fees in preschools. I understand the budget estimates state that the Department of Education and Training budget for preschool education services in government schools is \$19.7 million for 79 preschools for 2003-04. The Department of Education and Training preschools are situated on school sites. The average preschool fees are approximately \$3.20 per hour in 2002-03. As preschools are generally open between 9.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m., the average daily fee is therefore around \$20, after adjusting for inflation.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: How many preschools does DOCS run?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: We fund approximately 800 community-based preschools. But we do not run them.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You do not have any that are completely yours, do you?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: No, we provide a funding contribution to community-based organisations. The chief financial officer has just said he has got some information about the revenue for adoption fees. Did you want to go back to that now?

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: It saves putting a question on notice.

Mr PARISI: The difference between the \$825,000 budget in 2003-04 for grants and contributions for the Out-of-Home Care program, which is program 26.1.4, has increased to \$2.061 million, and the reasons for that are a \$1 million budget for an increase in adoption fees for overseas adoption, an increase in Hague Convention fees of \$125,000, and there is a minor adjustment of \$111,000, which is a miscellaneous estimate for other budget items that might come in.

CHAIR: I suppose we all wish we could have a miscellaneous budget of \$111,000.

Mr PARISI: When we are budgeting we have to allow some element. But \$111,000 is not a lot of money.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What is the department's philosophy in regard to addressing culturally appropriate needs of highly intensive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from the out-of-home care sector?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: There is a range of initiatives that are on the way to address that. Obviously, the rate of indigenous young people in out-of-home care is significantly higher, particularly when you look at the fact that they are only about 2 per cent of the population. I think about 25 per cent of children in out-of-home care are indigenous. The department attempts to conform with the Aboriginal placement principles whenever possible, that is, to place indigenous children who cannot live with their own families in an Aboriginal family, and if that is not possible certainly with someone who is able to ensure that they maintain contact with their own culture. But we are very conscious that we need to be doing more than that because clearly it is of great concern to all of us that there is such a high proportion of indigenous young people coming into care.

There are a number of things that need to be done. We need to look at the out-of-home care system itself, but I might just point out that other initiatives that form part of the department's early intervention and prevention functions are important as well because what we really want to aim to do is to prevent those children from coming into out-of-home care, whether they be indigenous or non-indigenous. The department provided some significant additional funding over 2003-04 to 2005-06 of approximately \$3.5 million; \$1 million was provided in 2003-03 to Aboriginal services so that they could provide additional placements. So we are trying to build the capacity within the Aboriginal out-of-home care organisation so that they are more able to offer placements to indigenous children who cannot live with their parents.

We are also funding some intensive support services. There is one at Casino—Malanee Bugilmah—which operates as a DOCS-funded service but it is not part of the formal DOCS community service centre [CSC] network. It works with families who are having some significant problems and it offers very intensive support. We have now funded another one of those services at Redfern to work in the Sydney central area, across the Sydney metropolitan area—that is Yallamundi. We will be establishing another two of those services, one in Bourke and one in Wollongong. The goal of those services is to work intensively with a family—and I am talking about really significant dysfunctionality and stress. The caseworkers usually have caseloads of two or three families, so they are working very closely with a family and they aim to support the family so that a child does not need to come into out-of-home care and so that the child can be kept safe. Sometimes they work with families when a child is being restored back to a family.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Minister, you spoke in terms of inputs rather than outputs; that you have put more money into this. I understand that at the moment you are still using lots of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services—is that the bottom line?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: No. I will try to find the information. We actually comply with the Aboriginal placement principle more than any other State and at a fairly high level, but I do not have the exact figure in front of me. I do not know if the director-general can recall.

Dr SHEPHERD: Off the top of the head, about 87 per cent of children are placed in accordance with the Aboriginal placement principle, which puts us ahead of all other States and Territories. The other thing is that we are not just not funding non-Aboriginal organisations at all. One of the key things that we are trying to do in DOCS is to fund Aboriginal organisations to provide the services, particularly foster care services, to Aboriginal children. Last year we did fund the Aboriginal

State Secretariat, which is an umbrella group for some foster care and other care providers and we will continue to fund them to provide additional training and resources to Aboriginal-auspiced foster care organisations in the hope that they will be able to increase the number of Aboriginal-auspiced organisations that are under the umbrella of the secretariat.

We also organised for a tripartite arrangement between the secretariat, the Office of the Children's Guardian and DOCS in order to ensure that these new Aboriginal services would meet the accreditation standards that will apply across all New South Wales. There is a very strong drive within the organisation to improve the services to Aboriginal communities by using Aboriginal services, and we are also working to try to improve the survival rate of Aboriginal services because, as you would probably be aware, their current rate of viability is much lower than non-Aboriginal services. We are trying to find ways to ensure that their viability is at the same level.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: When you say "viability" do you mean that long term you will continue delivering services?

Dr SHEPHERD: Long term many Aboriginal services collapse because of problems with governance, continuing funding and internal problems within the management of the organisations. The failure rate—and this is a rough figure—is round about 10 times the non-Aboriginal equivalent service failure rate. That is largely, in my view, because we have not supported them properly in the first place. That is one of the things that we need to get in there and start to address. We were hoping to use the Aboriginal State Secretariat as the key vehicle for doing that work. My intention is to continue trying to work with the Aboriginal State Secretariat to achieve that objective. [*Time expired.*]

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Minister, if I can raise concerns that have been raised with me by Playgroup New South Wales, which has given me three instances of playgroups that largely have been raided by the professionally supported playgroup organisations. Playgroups in Bellingen, Urunga and South Lismore were basically raided by Families First supported playgroups. The leaders of those playgroups visited and invited everybody from the community-based playgroup to join the supported playgroup and when these supports did not continue, they found that the community-based playgroups had just died off as a result or had difficulties. What protocols are in place to ensure that well-organised, long-term, community-based playgroups are not just raided by the professionally supported playgroups?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I have not had that issue raised actually, but it is an important one to look into. I think we would all agree that the concept of a supported playgroup is very important.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: They also agree with that, but their concern was—

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, but to a certain extent it is horses for courses. If there is an effectively functioning community playgroup that is operating, your supported playgroup should be in an area where people cannot access a playgroup or perhaps where there are some higher support needs. The best thing would be to consult with our Families First co-ordinators and come back with further information. I am not aware that protocols exist, but my understanding is that Families First works through a fairly strong regionally based network of services. One would think that sort of process would ensure that this does not happen, but I will look into it and come back to you.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Yes. I will document it for you from the correspondence. At Bellingen a playgroup had been operating for 22 years. The Families First worker in Bellingen acknowledges that its playgroup is having an adverse effect on the community group but said that they did not see it as a problem; in fact, they were actively encouraging members to swap to the supported playgroup. There was a problem at Urunga, which is conducted on the same day as an early childhood clinic. The early childhood clinic refers all clients to the supported playgroup regardless of their needs, even though the community-based group has been operating for 10 years on referrals. It now has no referrals, and that has had an obvious impact. South Lismore Families First supported playgroup is run on the same day as the community playgroup. The Families First person visited the community playgroup and encouraged its members to switch playgroups. That is just a sample of how their organisations, which do not require much Government subsidy, are being raided by organisations that sometimes receive up to \$20,000 or \$30,000 in subsidies from the Government.

The Hon. CARMEL Tebbutt: We will look into that. Clearly, it is not in anyone's interest for that to be happening.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: When will we be able to again receive child protection data on a quarterly basis?

The Hon. CARMEL Tebbutt: That is a good question. As you are aware, we have had some difficulties with our data with regards to both the quality of it and the comparability because of the swap to the new client information system. DOCS is certainly committed to providing data in a timely manner but it also has to be as accurate as possible. The department has introduced a new key information delivery system [KiDS]—I know you are fully aware of that. The implementation of the new client system meant that caseworkers had to be trained in the use of KiDS and in new processes that were introduced with the system. A new reporting framework for DOCS information also had to be produced. New processes were developed for data extraction and quality assurance new computer programs are being written to support these processes and to produce reports from the new client system.

This has delayed the provision of data for the quarterly Internet reports, as information based on KiDS data cannot be published until DOCS can ensure that the information is accurate and consistent. The department is going through a data remediation exercise at the moment. It is the expectation that the 2003-04 annual report will have similar child protection data to that which was provided in the last annual report, and then for the 2004-05 report the data should be remediated and the data we collect will be of a standard that we will be able to use in the annual report. The director-general may want to add to that.

Dr SHEPHERD: Your question related also to the publication of the data on the Internet.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Yes.

Dr SHEPHERD: It is our intention, as soon as we have the data remediated. We should then not have a problem with collection of data going forward from the end of this quarter—but there is still a bit of work to do. Then probably round about the end of the third quarter of this year or at the end of the financial year we will be in a position from then on to publish this data on a regular quarterly basis. I did foreshadow that this would be a problem when I appeared a couple of times before standing committees of this House because of the three changes in the computer system that were going to occur in a very short space of time.

With the best will in the world we cannot make it work any better than it has worked over the last period of time. That is now fixed. We will fix it going forward. There is a clear undertaking from the Minister and from me at different points of time to put this material out there as close to real time as we can.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: What is the department using for statistics in the meantime? You must be governing yourselves somehow or other with child protection information. What are you using?

The Hon. CARMEL Tebbutt: We still have the information that comes into the help line in terms of total number of reports and the number of reports that are referred to CSCs, but it is the more detailed data that it is difficult for the department to capture on a statewide basis.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Is there some way in which you can explain to the Committee what needs to be remediated? When I visited the help line an awful lot of the data appeared to be live. You could see graphs and things operating on television screens so it does appear that your capacity to capture data is infinitely better than it used to be.

The Hon. CARMEL Tebbutt: And we do provide that. That is the total number of reports that come in. We provide that, and we provide which of them are then referred to the CSCs. It is what happens beyond that point that is more difficult—but the director-general can explain it in more detail.

Dr SHEPHERD: What you do not have is some of the information that is related to the secondary risk of harm assessments, which is, from my perspective, the important data for knowing exactly what is happening with the cohorts of children. When we talk about data remediation, what that involves is a group of people who are specialists in data—one located in each region—working with the caseworkers. It is not the data remediators who enter the data. The data remediators go back to the caseworkers and say, "For these particular cases we need this particular piece of information", which is extracted from the files and then inserted into the system.

The information is there, it is just not on the system, and if it is not on the system we cannot extract it in a way that would enable us to put the data out on a regular quarterly basis. As soon as it is taken from the files and inserted into the system, we are then in a position to be able to do that. That is what we mean when we talk about data remediation—it is working at exactly what bits we want, going back, getting it and putting it on the system. If your next question is: "wouldn't it be easier to do it in the first place", the answer is yes.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I thought that was largely what caseworkers did: they operated electronically on a file?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: But what you are not taking into account is the difficulty that we had after the new client information system was introduced in October, when it was falling over for parts of the day over a period of time while we managed what needed to occur to make that system robust. The system is now robust but we are still dealing with the effect of that period of time when the system was not available for caseworkers to use.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: The data you do have is the number of reports that are made?

Dr SHEPHERD: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Do you know the number of reports that can be categorised as levels 1, 2, 3 and 4?

Dr SHEPHERD: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: That is some of the most useful data. Is it not possible to at least publish that limited material on a quarterly basis?

Dr SHEPHERD: I do not want to give you a wrong answer. If it is possible to do it, then certainly there is no objection to doing it, and we would do that. I think what we were waiting for was to be in a position to publish the complete data set that we believe we should be publishing on a quarterly basis. But if it is possible to publish a subset of it, with a clear understanding that you know and we know that it is not the complete data set, then we can do that.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: How many children who are part of the out-of-home care system do not have an allocated caseworker?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: I could not provide that information for you and I do not believe that we would be able to provide that information because of some of the data problems that the director-general has just outlined. We did recognise in the announcement that we made in December 2002 that we needed to improve the ratio of caseworker to children in out-of-home care.

The number of caseworkers available to support children in out-of-home care is fewer in the Department of Community Services compared to the non-government sector. That is why we are committed to recruiting an extra 150 caseworkers over the five years of the package to specifically work in out-of-home care. In the first year a substantial number of those caseworkers are working to support children with very high needs, the intensive support services. In 2004-05 the intention is that the new caseworkers recruited will form foster care support teams and work specifically to provide better support to foster carers.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Can you at least scope for the Committee—if not accurately, at least give some idea—whether it is half, one-third or most?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: We will take that on notice and provide what information we can, but I simply alert you to the fact that I do not think we can provide the information in the way that you have asked for it.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Do a significant proportion of children in the out-of-home care system have caseworkers?

Dr SHEPHERD: There will be some children in the out-of-home care system who do not have a currently allocated caseworker. There will be no children in the high needs group, and I would think in the group underneath them, who do not have an allocated caseworker. We can try to get an estimate of the rest of the figures, and we are happy to provide that estimate. Obviously, once this data system is working properly we will be able to give it to you down to a decimal point. That is the position we would like to be in, and that is clearly the position that you would like to be in.

CHAIR: What measures are in place under Home Care for the welfare of the carers, not just the clients?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is not under DOCS—

CHAIR: We have just had good carers week and you probably issued a press release on it.

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is right. Despite the fact that I have reached down for my folder, I do not think there is any particular detail in the folder about how we support the carers in Home Care. However, it is the case that, as part of the process that DADAHC has been going through with regard to the post restructure, the department is very conscious of the need to appropriately integrate Home Care into the overall agency. One of the key functions for Home Care is the fact that it has a large, and largely casual, part-time work force that works in very geographically spread areas. Therefore, supporting those carers is particularly important. I think I should take your question on notice and provide more detailed information.

CHAIR: I would appreciate that. Finally, I want to ask Ms Gillian Calvert a question concerning the commission. While we all appreciate the lowering of the incidence of teenage suicide, there is still a significant number of suicides among children and younger teenagers. What interaction is there between the commission and the national suicide prevention strategies and organisations?

Ms CALVERT: About two years ago the Child Death Review Team, at the request of the Government, finalised a report on the number of children who had died from suicide and risk taking over a set period of time. We made some recommendations to the Government regarding the updating of strategies that were being run at the State level.

CHAIR: That was the point. What is happening with those strategies?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: It might be more appropriate for me to answer because the commission made its recommendations and it was up to Government to respond to those recommendations. The major recommendation, as I recall, was that we needed to update our suicide prevention policy, for which the Department of Health has responsibility.

CHAIR: I would like to see what the integration is on the national strategy. Perhaps you could take it on notice, and I will look forward to your reply.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Since Families First was introduced as an early intervention program, what benchmarks have been put in place to check whether it is working? For example, are fewer children who have been subject to a Families First program being notified to the department?

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Families First has only just been passed to the Department of Community Services as a program the department is responsible for in 2004-05.

Previously it sat with the Office of Children and Young People. There is an extensive evaluation process under way with regard to Families First. I am not familiar with the detail of it, but I would be happy to provide the honourable member with more information about that. Nonetheless, whether or not you could track that Families First has had an impact on reports of concern to the Department of Community Services might be difficult. I remember some anecdotal information that we had at one point in time which seemed to indicate that there was not as rapid an increase in reports of concern to the department in south-western Sydney.

Families First was first rolled out in south-western Sydney so there was some sense that this would be related. Whether that has been explored any further is something I would have to come back to you on. I just mentioned that the department is now rolling out its own early intervention and prevention program, which will specifically work with those families that have either been reported, or are at risk of being reported, to DOCS. That program will obviously co-ordinate with Families First but it will not have the same universal focus as Families First.

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
