

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 2

Friday 22 June 2001

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

COMMUNITY SERVICES, AGEING, DISABILITY SERVICES, AND WOMEN

The Committee met at 1.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Dr. B. P. V. Pezzutti (Chair)

The Hon. Jan Burnswoods
The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans
The Hon. R. D. Dyer
The Hon. Amanda Fazio

The Hon. Patricia Forsythe
The Hon. J. F. Ryan
The Hon. Dr P. Wong

PRESENT

The Hon. Faye Lo Po', *Minister for Community Services, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Women*

Department of Community Services

Ms C. Niland, *Director-General*

Mr F. Orton, *Assistant Director, Finance*

Ms K. Boland, *Executive Director, Corporate Communications*

Ms T. Milne, *Acting Executive Director, Corporate Strategy Directorate*

Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care

Mr A. Cappie-Wood, *Acting Director-General*

Ms M. Hammerton, *Executive Director, Strategic Policy, Planning and Funding Directorate*

Ms E. McAlpine, *Executive Director, Disability Services Directorate*

Mr K. Stevens, *Manager, Finance*

Mr M. Hetherington, *General Manager, Home Care*

Department for Women

Ms R. Henderson, *Director-General*

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CHAIR: I welcome you, Minister, to the hearing of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 and thank you and your departmental officers for attending here today. Before questions commence some procedural matters need to be dealt with. Part 4 of the resolution referring the budget estimates to the Committee requires evidence to be given in public. The Committee has previously resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of its public proceedings. Copies of those guidelines are available from the attendants on request. I point out that in accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcast 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 photos.

In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, the media must take responsibility for what you publish and what interpretation you place on anything that is said before the Committee. For the benefit of members and Hansard, could departmental officers identify themselves by name, position and department or agency before answering any questions referred to them.

To ensure that an accurate record is made of today's proceeding, I would ask witnesses to provide to Hansard copies of any notes or any other written material that they may refer to when answering questions. Where a member is seeking information in relation to a particular aspect of a program or a subprogram, it would be helpful if that program or subprogram were identified. It has been agreed by the Committee that the Opposition will take up the first 20 minutes, followed by the crossbench members with 10 minutes each, followed by the Government members, if they have any questions. If they have no questions, the time will be divided equally amongst the non-government members. Do you anticipate any problems with these arrangements to date?

Ms LO PO': Could you just go back over the arrangements in relation to the papers? I did not hear that.

CHAIR: To ensure that an accurate record is made of today's proceeding, I would ask witnesses to provide to Hansard copies of any notes or other written material that they may refer to when answering questions so that the transcript will be more accurate—not to us; to Hansard. They would be returned, of course, to the Minister's office from Hansard. That will not be tabled documents. Should you seek to table a document, would you please indicate that, and that matter will be discussed. As the lower House is, in fact, sitting, could you advise whether you need to attend divisions this afternoon?

Ms LO PO': I have sought a pair for this proceeding.

CHAIR: Thank you. If the bells do ring, I would ask the speaker to stop speaking until the bells cease ringing and commence speaking again when the bells stop ringing. I declare the proposed expenditure open for examination and I ask the Opposition members to begin questions.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Minister, how much money was allocated to the implementation and operation of Helpline in the 2000-01 budget? Was there any money allocated in the supplementary budget? And how much has been spent to date?

Ms LO PO': Before we start, could I just say that there is an unprecedented amount of funding in the 2001-02 budget for the Department of Community Services of New South Wales. After taking account of the transfer of the pensioner electricity subsidy scheme to the Ministry of Energy and Utilities, funding across the portfolio for Community Services has increased by \$45.9 million, an 8.4 per cent increase to \$595 million, which is a record. Your precise question about the Helpline I will refer to the director-general.

Ms NILAND: An additional \$5 million has been allocated to the Helpline in the 2001-02 budget, bringing the total operational budget to \$11.942 million, of which \$644,000 is available for capital costs.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I recognise that it was a little while ago and you may not have noticed, but I was also asking about the details in the budget just finished. How much did we spend last year on Helpline? I was trying to get some idea of the comparison between the two amounts.

Ms NILAND: The budget just finished has not just finished; it does not finish until 30 June.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Indeed.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: How much has actually been spent to date? How much was allocated in the budget last year and how much has actually been spent?

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Given there is only another three weeks to go you should have a rough idea, I think.

Ms NILAND: I will take it on notice.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Was there any supplementary budget allocated for last year?

Ms NILAND: No.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Minister, with regard to notifications and case allocation, last year you said:

With the setting up of the teleservice centre DOCS will now be able to more accurately measure caseloads across the State and allocate resources accordingly.

With your new improved data collection, can you tell us the total number of reports recorded, the total number of cases allocated to community service centres [CSCs] and how many of the cases reported to CSCs have then become unallocated?

Ms LO PO': Thank you for the question. As you all know, the Helpline started in December and it is now June, so it has been going for six months. It is early days yet but the issues of what we are finding out with the Helpline are really important. It is giving us a road map to what is happening in this State to children and what is happening with their abuse. The Helpline was introduced as a result of calls for a consistent child protection intake system from agencies such as the child death review team, the Community Services Commission and the Wood royal commission. The Helpline provides the public with one point of contact to report child abuse and neglect. Before the Helpline was introduced calls were taken at community service centres across New South Wales.

The Helpline will free up, and is freeing up, frontline staff to deal with child protection matters. The result is greater consistency around the State. DOCS no longer has 85 entry points across the State. There is just one. This means that the same risk assessment principles are applied to all incoming child protection calls. Whilst the Helpline incorporates features that are common to call centres around the world such as the telephone management technology and demand modelling rostering services and operates quite differently in that it is dealing with complex and sensitive child protection issues, the overall objectives of the Helpline are to improve consistency, improve service delivery and, consequently, improve performance and efficiency. Your question is about what is happening in this regard. Can I tell you that I need to take it on notice because six months into what we are doing is not a wide enough spread for us to be accurate in what we are telling you, but let me assure you that the improvement in the quality of what is happening in child abuse and the Helpline is very noticeable and has been remarked on by many people.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: What are the staffing levels for the operation of the Helpline, please?

Ms NILAND: I would like to go through the staffing levels with you. I will start with the initial staffing level at 18 December 2000. At that time we had 55 case workers, 13 team leaders, 20 customer service officers, no shift managers, a total of 88. They are the people who are mainly concerned with operational work. In addition, there were clerical staff and a manager and an operations manager. As of 25 May there are 101 case workers and the same number of team leaders. The number of customer service officers has been reduced by a third to 19. Shift managers are the same, giving us a total of 135. By the first week in July, since the beginning of the new financial year, there will be 130 case workers, 13 team leaders—that number remains the same—19 customer service officers, two shift managers, a total operational staff of 164.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I did not quite catch the two totals.

Ms NILAND: The total number of operational staff as at the commencement of the Helpline on 18 December 2000 was 88. The total number of operational staff at 1 July will be 164.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: That is 1 July this year, so are you saying that the increase in staff has not necessarily yet occurred?

Ms NILAND: The increases have consistently occurred. We consider a staff person to be thoroughly on board when their five weeks training is finished. They have four weeks intensive training and one week working in a community service centre. The numbers I have given you are at the time when they will be fully operational.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: How many faxes have been received by Helpline each month since it commenced?

Ms LO PO': We need to take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I guess I am trying to get some sort of a handle on whether the increase in staff is sufficient to deal with the increase in caseload. Could you give us some idea as to what the increase in child abuse notifications has been during the current financial year and how that compares with the previous financial year?

Ms NILAND: I cannot give you the details of that authoritatively. Whereas the substantial part of the question I will take on notice, I want to make these preliminary comments. When the new Act was passed on 18 December the initial child abuse report was considerably different in definition to what we had done previously. So that over the course of the financial year, we have one set of definitions coming up against another set.

In addition, the number of statutory reporters was expanded by about 30 per cent or 40 per cent and the Helpline was introduced as well. One of the key aspects of introducing the Helpline was that, for the first time in DOCS, every single thing that came in the door was being recorded as a child protection report, whereas previously that had not occurred. These sets of factors mean that we cannot compare the beginning of the financial year with the end of the financial year at this stage. In order to make that possible, we have hired someone from the Australian Bureau of Statistics to work through our data and help make it clear and comparable. That will be available in time for our annual report.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: The outcomes statements that you have given in the budget papers appear to indicate that the number of reports concerning children and young people has increased from 51,000 prior to the start of 2000 or 1999-2000. Given that the figure for the current financial year is 59,500 and that next year you anticipate having 67,700, are you saying that those figures involve some level of non-comparability? If so, what other benchmark do you use for your normal day-to-day management of determining whether there has been an increase in reporting of child abuse?

Ms NILAND: That is a difficult question because of the difficulty with the numbers. When I was doing these figures for the budget papers, I was confident that I was being conservative and I had them checked statistically so that they were as sound as we could possibly have at the time. You will also note that there is a projected increase for the coming financial year in the amount of anticipated child abuse reports.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Given that these figures, without explanation, look a little alarming, how do you know whether there has been an increase in child abuse within the community? Do you have something else that you use for your day-to-day allocation of staff to determine their priorities and those sorts of things? You must have some benchmark to determine whether or not there is a significant increase in the order that these figures would suggest.

For example, the reports concerning children and young people appear to have gone from 73,000 in 1999 to 115,400 during the next year. That looks to be somewhat large. I am not trying to be difficult, but how do you know whether there is going to be an increase, since the figures are either dramatically incomparable or they are to the point that it is almost meaningless to try to make a comparison of any kind.

If it is the case that they are not comparing apples with apples, what other benchmark do you use to determine for your own purposes and your own management and submission within the Government as to whether you are making an adequate response to the demand that occurs in the community?

Ms NILAND: I am not denying or walking away from those figures. Those figures show a considerable increase that we are predicting and we believe that since the Helpline has come in, we are accurately capturing the actual demand as opposed to previously when that demand was not captured. If you like, those figures are figures of transparent demand. It is clear for the first time what is happening with the reporting of child abuse.

CHAIR: Demand means notifications, not actual abuse in the community?

Ms NILAND: That is correct, and under the new Act we have to use the word “reports” rather than “notifications”. So that is the first thing. I am not backing away from those figures. What I am saying to you is that in order to give anything more than what is in the budget papers, I am waiting until the person from the Bureau of Statistics clarifies aspects of the data.

Clearly, there has been an increase in the reporting of child abuse. There are a couple of things we have to do. First, does that increase in reportage turn into an increase in confirmed reports? Now there is a time lag factor in that. That will be clear at the end of the financial year. Second, is this an increase in activity or is it an increase in true demand? We are indicating in the budget papers that there has clearly been an increase in real demand, but we are reluctant to quantify it at this time any further than we have done in the budget papers.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: When you say you will have more detail for the annual report, do you mean the next annual report to be issued on or around the end of this year?

Ms NILAND: That is right.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Minister, when you were telling Parliament on 27 February that the longest time to answer a call on the Helpline was 11 minutes, were you aware that no accurate statistics were being kept as the clocks indicating waiting times were automatically resetting each time a call was checked by a customer service officer before it was answered by an intake officer?

Ms LO PO': What I can tell you about the Helpline is a vast improvement on that. Yesterday the waiting time was seven minutes, and we think that is a tremendous improvement. People have suggested that seven minutes is still a long time to wait. Can I just say that this is about protecting children. This is not just picking up the phone and ordering something over the phone; this is about giving information that can lead to the protection of children. We have worked very hard. The staff on the Helpline have worked incredibly hard, and as of yesterday the waiting time was seven minutes. I believe that at two o'clock yesterday afternoon it was as low as three minutes. So you can see that there has been a real effort by the staff to make sure that we give a quality service. This is not at the expense of quality. We are certainly responding to a community which is very keen to report child abuse.

CHAIR: That was not quite the question that was asked.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I have made a point.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Minister, how much money has been allocated to the DOCS transformation for 2000-01 and how much of that was spent? Can you give some impression of the current status of the transformation process?

Ms NILAND: The transformation was completed in May this year. The other question was how much money was spent on it, and that is a question I will have to take on notice. I can just go through for you the results of the transformation. After the transformation had finished we had reduced the number of areas from 16 to eight. We improved the lines of communication in child and family services with the creation of eight new directors of child and family; 36 managers, client services; and 155 managers, casework. Part of the reason I am taking on notice the question about what it would cost is that the purpose of the transformation was to do it all within the existing resources and, therefore, in order to get the additional management staff we produced savings elsewhere in the organisation, particularly in the central office.

CHAIR: Director-general, is there very much more to this answer, because the Opposition time is running out?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: We do not mind if the Director-General finishes her answer.

CHAIR: I am quite happy but it is just that the Opposition time is running out. That is all.

Ms NILAND: So we have our eight directors, child and family services; we have our eight senior practitioners; in children's services we have increased the number of children's services advisers by 25 to, effectively, 80.6; and the

number of community program positions has also been increased from 48 to 70. We have added 40 caseworker positions in child and family, and they have gone to our high volume community service centres.

They have also gone to areas of greatest need in the rural and regional areas. For example, in the Hunter we have increased the number of case workers by 20 per cent, but one of the critical aspects of the transformation was to change the supervisory ratios, and those supervisory ratios now are a supervision span of one manager or team leader to six case workers.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Minister, there has been some criticism of the tendering process for Disability Services.

Ms LO PO': Are we doing Disability Services?

CHAIR: No, we are doing DOCS first.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Despite the increasing costs, Minister, there has been no growth funding for services under the Community Service Grants program [CSGP] for five years and only one increase of \$2.5 million in 1995 for the five years previous to that for over 1,000 projects. This is not much per project. How many of these projects have found it necessary to reduce hours for paid staff and what impact has this had on the outcomes for clients from those groups?

Ms LO PO': We are looking for an answer for you but we cannot find it. In 2001-02 the program budget is \$75,640,000, an increase of 10.3 per cent over the previous budget. The allocation of funding in 2001-02 is \$4.1 million for 38 child protection services, \$34.8 million for 297 family and individual support services, \$20.081 for 465 community development services, and \$16.6 for 322 community youth and adolescent support services.

The 10.3 per cent increase represents \$7.068 million, which is allocated as follows: families first strategy, \$3.9 million; area assistance scheme pick-ups, \$0.796 million; indexation, \$1.814 million; other variations \$0.288 million; and enhancements—the Cabramatta project—\$270,000.

In answer to the second part of your question, any requests for additional funds for individual services will be considered after the CSGP framework is finalised. Funding decisions will also take into account the local and State planning priorities and be subject to the existence of available CSGP funds.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is there monitoring of the output of these groups, though? If these groups are doing something and you are giving them money, are you monitoring what they do, so that if they stop doing it, would you be able to measure the changes or if they were doing it well, would you notice the changes? If you cannot measure it, surely you should not be giving them any money, and if they are doing it well or reducing services, you should adjust their budget accordingly.

Ms NILAND: We have negotiated with the community sector over a period of two years to create a new funding framework for the Community Service Grants program. That funding framework is out for consultation now. It is a three-month consultation period. While that is going on, we have had agreement with the sector that we will have through our Community Partners Directorate a different approach to the funding agreement that we have with the sector.

We have put in, as I said, under the transformation about 20 additional community program operatives to provide our community partners with better support and to assist in monitoring their performance. We are reaching agreement with them as to how that will be done. If an agency performs poorly and it is not meeting the terms of its funding agreement, then the community program officer works with that agency, first of all, to see what modifications need to be made to bring it into compliance.

As you understand, the community sector network is fragile. It is fragile because it has suffered many strains over the years of more and more people taking full-time jobs and not being able to volunteer and participate in community volunteering work, particularly on boards, in the way that they did previously. So we work with them to try to get new boards or to improve their performance.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Sure, but is there a measured outcome for clients? You are saying that your staff are monitoring and working with them at a managerial level. That is fine. Obviously you have this tender process, but many people may write tenders and there has been a lot of criticism of management generally that people are better at writing things than delivering them.

In terms of actually delivering them, is there feedback from clients of what happens? What mechanisms are there for that? We are expanding all these tender assessment mechanisms which are paper assessments but is there actual feedback from the clients and if there is, what do they think about it? The increases have been very small in this area, despite rising costs, the GST and everything else.

Ms NILAND: The Minister made it clear to the sector as we were negotiating the changed framework that, during that period, there would not be increases in the Community Service Grants program. Once the sector moves with us to the new documents, the new framework which is output based, and agrees to the output measures, then they will be measured by that. Some of the output measures have not been agreed to at this time, so we have to wait until the sector agrees to them before the actual outputs can be monitored.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Surely the sector is not asking that you not monitor its outputs, particularly if it is trying to get more money for those outputs or it is feeling that the lack of increases in their grants is preventing them achieving their outputs?

Ms NILAND: I am agreeing with you.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Are you saying the groups have not agreed on the output measures and, therefore, they are not being measured?

Ms NILAND: Output measures are being introduced at the moment.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So there have been no output measures until now except in the opinion of the supervisory staff?

Ms NILAND: There would be so many staff for such a program offered and it would have to deal with so many clients.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: And is there feedback from those clients?

Ms NILAND: Yes, the agencies themselves request feedback from the clients. That is not something that DOCS does.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: DOCS does not independently monitor the service?

Ms NILAND: We monitor the service but there are other ways of doing it other than requesting direct feedback from the clients of those services.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What other ways are they?

Ms NILAND: We do it according to their funding agreement, to see whether they have complied with their funding agreement. That is something that is agreed to by the agencies and ourselves sitting down side by side and agreeing that these are the things that they will do.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Minister, what resources and funding are provided for in the budget for intensive support services for children in care? In what specific ways have these services improved or deteriorated since the closure of Ormond and Minali, in particular referring to outcomes for children such as increased or reduced health and behaviour problems, access to family members, drug or prostitution drift?

What are the comparative pre-closure and post-closure statistics on children who were or would have been institutionalised since the closure of those institutes? What is the comparative per capita cost on a daily or weekly basis

of placing children in previous institutional care versus current accommodation services in non-institutionalised care, including the cost associated with staff or other supervision?

Ms LO PO': That is a huge question. May I take it on notice?

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Yes. Minister, in regard to asset acquisitions for DOCS, a massive 2 per cent, or \$12.6 million, of the total departmental budget is to be spent on system design, specification and implementation of a financial management system. Please detail what specific objectives in terms of performance criteria changes, et cetera, are expected from this new system and the shortcomings of the previous system. What research and analysis on such system availability has preceded this budget, and what are the tender specifications for this system?

Ms LO PO': Do you have any short questions?

Ms NILAND: Dr Wong, are you referring to what we refer to as the SAP?

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Yes.

Ms NILAND: The question is a detailed one and to do it justice we will have to take it on notice.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: What standards are being applied for out-of-school hours care?

Ms LO PO': That is a short question.

Ms NILAND: We will take that on notice also, Dr Wong.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Minister, last year this Committee was informed that new software was in the process of being installed to allow case work to be retrieved with ease and to allow cross-referencing and data collection. Now that the software has been installed, what data retrieval and research statistics, et cetera, by cross-referencing has been performed?

CHAIR: May I say that is a very good question.

Ms NILAND: But the answer to it is long. There is complex data available and I think it would be better if we took that question on notice also.

CHAIR: You have actually retired the old computer?

Ms NILAND: We are phasing it out, Dr Pezzutti.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Minister, with the additional 60 child protection case workers, how many were in the front line rather than higher in the management tree, and will the case load level become realistic with this drop? That is, will there still be an overburden in case load level?

Ms NILAND: The 60 case workers who are in training at the moment and who will, after their first weeks training, begin their first week next week, are all being deployed to the front line. There are 60 permanent case workers. There are five temporary or short-term case workers and there are four case work managers, so none of them is being deployed anywhere except in the front line.

CHAIR: Perhaps I could ask a brief question. Minister, last year, the year before that and the year before that I asked for the benchmarks of the time taken between notification and the client being seen or some action being taken in the field. Are those benchmarks yet available?

Ms NILAND: Dr Pezzutti, there are no national bench marks on that. What we have—

CHAIR: Do you have any benchmarks, yes or no? You promised them to me the first time I asked almost three years ago. Last year you said you would have them within six months. The answer is that you still do not have them?

Ms NILAND: No, we have them.

CHAIR: Are they published?

Ms NILAND: No.

CHAIR: Could you table them or send them to the Committee?

Ms NILAND: What I will be able to provide you with is the percentage of cases. I think the question was—

CHAIR: I understood that Health has a benchmark for category 1 people to be seen within five minutes, that 70 per cent have to be achieved in that time, and so on. You said you were going to mirror that. Do you have those?

Ms NILAND: I do not have them with me.

CHAIR: Could you send them to the Committee later?

Ms NILAND: What we have is a risk assessment process. Under the risk assessment process we have four categories, and those categories state how and in what time frame a client should be seen as a result of the priority that they have been given there.

CHAIR: Good.

Ms NILAND: We can then say with category one and two with some certainty what actually is happening. When it gets to category three and category four, category four being a report about a child with lice in their hair or something like that, these are the kinds of issues that we usually refer to the non-government sector.

CHAIR: So you have those categories and you have performance figures on how the various areas are doing in that?

Ms NILAND: That is correct.

CHAIR: Thank you very much: if you could send those to the Committee, I would be really pleased.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Minister, can you tell us what the Department of Community Services is doing to support preschools in New South Wales.

Ms LO PO': The New South Wales Government's budget allocation for children's services in 2001-02 will provide funding of some \$76 million to over 1,300 early childhood services to help them deliver 34,500 places for preschool age children. This funding includes the \$2.5 million that I have recently released to help maintain vital early childhood services in small rural towns and to help reduce their cost for families on low incomes. It also includes an allocation of \$10 million to help children with additional needs to access services.

In addition, the budget includes some \$8 million in funding that will help provide more than 9,000 places in funded services for younger children; \$4.3 million for supported play groups, toy library and support and resource services; and \$2.3 million for the provision of vacation care services during the school holidays. The programmed budget also includes funding for the new 19.5 children's service advisers who will be starting in the next few weeks and funding for the CPI increase of 2.2 per cent.

The funding from this budget will build upon our many achievements in children's services and will strengthen our position as a contemporary leader in this field. The New South Wales Government's early childhood service policy that I launched during Children's Week in October last year provides clear directions for our funding involvement for this very important community activity.

These directions include the fostering of children's intellect, physical, emotional and social development; enabling service providers and the staff to act as appropriate supports and resources; linking services into education, health and family support systems; supporting community-based services and assisting children who are socially disadvantaged or

who have additional needs to gain priority access to services. The Children's Services program in New South Wales is structured differently from that operating in other States and Territories, and for good reasons.

The primary aim of the Commonwealth's Child-care program, for example, is to assist with work force participation. In other States and Territories there is a clear distinction in program delivery that separates preschool and care services. In most jurisdictions, the major funding involved in children's services is a provision of a fixed period of preschool for children in the year before they commence formal schooling.

New South Wales has taken the position that all licensed early childhood centres should operate according to the same standards, provide similar quality programs and activities appropriate to children's ages and provide a range of service responses able to meet the diversity of parents' needs. The approach adopted by New South Wales is to provide parents with real choices about the type of service that they can use rather than limiting choice by placing artificial boundaries around the entitlement, as the Commonwealth has done and by segregating the functions of education and care. This approach means that children access what is termed a preschool program irrespective of whether they attend a preschool service, a long day care service or an occasional child care service.

The 2001 report on children on government services produced by the Productivity Commission indicates that approximately 85 per cent of children of preschool age received an early childhood program at a New South Wales funded service. The department's Office of Child Care that I established to better profile services and the department's children's service advisers are continually working with services to assist them in the provision of good-quality, responsive services. This work includes developing practice tools such as our internationally recognised resource kit on early childhood literacy; providing advice on regulatory matters and the safeguard for children and protection of children while in care, and on contemporary research of practice on child development issues; supporting services with planning and service development in response to the needs of families and communities; and assisting services with their management obligations, including their financial viability.

In relation to the allocation of the budget to assist children with additional needs, the previous New South Wales Coalition Government reviewed funding for children's services for four years and did nothing about the review's findings. This included the funding allocated for children with additional needs. The New South Wales Labor Government liked the new funding approach and sector developed as part of the review to improve access to the services for children with additional needs. The new pooling approach to funding of these children is based on access and equity principles and on providing the appropriate services that are required to support each child's inclusion to aid their development and to meet their needs in a systematic way. DOCS conducted a three-year pilot of the new approach, and its evaluation proved it to be successful and to have merit for implementation across the State. We have increased the funding for the new scheme by \$1.25 million, bringing the total allocation of funding to \$2 million.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Minister, given that the role of the Director-General of DOCS changed recently with the loss of Ageing and Disability Services and Home Care, why has the grading for the director-general not altered? In other words, why is her salary continuing at the existing level?

Ms LO PO': That is not my call.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Pardon?

Ms LO PO': That is not anything that I dictate.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: That is a decision of what—the Premier's Department?

Ms LO PO': It is not done in my office or under my auspices.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Do you know who does it? There is no answer.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The child care and protection legislation, Minister, has not been implemented and I gather some of it has not been proclaimed. Is that correct?

Ms LO PO': Sorry, could you ask the question again?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The child care protection legislation has not been implemented. My understanding is that a considerable part of it has not yet been proclaimed. Is that right?

Ms LO PO': Parts of it will be proclaimed this year. Some parts of it pertain to the Children's Guardian that we will continue to proclaim through this year, and by the end of the year it should be proclaimed.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Will the whole bill be implemented by the end of the year? What is your time frame for the implementation of it?

Ms LO PO': Do I have time to read this response or do you want a quicker answer to this?

CHAIR: It may be helpful if you gave a response which goes to the nub of the matter and then give us the remainder of the response, if that is appropriate.

Ms LO PO': We have a progress program on this and I will take the question on notice.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: A very quick question, Minister. Minister, with your 60 child protection case workers, what qualification is required to be a case worker?

Ms NILAND: I am going to answer this from memory but I will also help you by putting it formally in writing. The qualifications are that they have a university degree or equivalent in a social science or social work, which would mean that they have had exposure with some clinical training throughout their degree. I am happy to say that all of the people that we have selected as the 60 case workers have all met those criteria. The majority of them were working temporarily with us anyway, so they have also had considerable exposure to DOCS casework before they came on board. We are lucky that we can get a group of people who can hit the ground running.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Minister, or the director-general—either of you—I am interested to find out how many of the children that have an interaction from DOCS, particularly people who are subject to what I think are called parental protection orders under the new care and protection legislation—the people who we used to understand as State wards—wind up in juvenile justice? Does the department keep any statistics or records as to how many of those kids wind up in juvenile justice?

Ms NILAND: I am happy to provide the answer to that in writing.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Does the department have some sort of regular reporting on and statistics relating to children who are subject to care orders, as to what the outcomes are for them? How many, for example, are in detention, die or pass out of care, and how they perform at school or anything of that nature?

Ms NILAND: There is a variety of statistics that we keep but I think it would be better to give the detail in a more considered answer as well.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Is there a regular bulletin or report issued?

Ms NILAND: There is not a regular report or bulletin that is issued on that.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: How do you know how well you are doing in looking after those children?

Ms NILAND: You know how well you are doing while reviewing casework.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I can understand that applies in individual cases but how, as a management tool, do you benchmark your performance for looking after what are essentially State kids over time?

Ms NILAND: We benchmark it on a number of issues, including educational attainment and how we intend to do that is under consideration at the moment.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: But you do not do it now?

Ms NILAND: Educational attainment?

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Yes?

Ms NILAND: The main indicators of educational performance that one can get in a congregate fashion from the Department of School Education are statistics that do not identify the reading or literacy scores of the individual. In order to get a group report on the 8,000 children in care, one first needs a register of all children in care. I have just asked, at the Minister's direction, the Children's Guardian to compile the children's register on my behalf. Once that is clarified, we will then be able to request certain statistics of the Department of School Education.

[Short adjournment]

Ms LO PO': Mr Chairman, in answer to a question from the Hon. Patricia Forsythe, I am advised that Dr Col Gellatly, Director-General, Premier's Department, is responsible for the grading and evaluation of chief executive officers.

CHAIR: Thank you. The Committee will now deal with Ageing and Disability Services.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I would like to follow up on that particular answer. Did you apply for a regrading in view of the changed responsibilities of your director-general and are you also able to advise the salary level of your Acting Director-General of Ageing, Disability and Home Care?

Ms LO PO': I will take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Minister, how much of the \$20 million allocated in 2000-01 to remove people from what is known as blocked respite beds was spent? How many people has that money been spent on and how many people have been relocated from respite beds?

Ms LO PO': Chairman, could I make an opening statement. The new department will be starting off in the 2001-02 financial year with a substantial funding boost. The total expenditure budget for the new Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care [DADHC] in 2001-02 is \$1.1 billion. This represents an increase of \$137.906 million comparative with the 2000-01 budget and more than \$76 million revised expenditure for 2000-01. For budget reporting purposes, the total expenditure has been allocated across the Ageing, Home and Community Care and Disability program and Disability Services Directorate.

Total spending and distribution program commitments include an additional \$10.5 million for the Health and Community Care [HACC] program; \$3.4 for the Ageing program, including \$2.7 million for the first year of the Dementia program, \$11 million over four years and \$0.6 million for seniors IT strategy as part of the \$1.7 million program over three years; a record total of \$804.3 for disability support services for people through government and non-government services allocated through the Commonwealth-State Disability Agreement, with the Commonwealth funds set at \$164.1 million and the balance being the contribution of New South Wales; \$13.5 million additional funding for community-based accommodation support services; \$5.5 million to provide one-off funding for immediate assistance to individuals on an assessed need; \$4 million extra for respite services in the community; \$2 million extra for new equipment for children with disabilities; \$9.5 million capital to be provided to the Office of Community Housing to purchase housing for people moving from licensed residential centres to funded supported accommodation; \$2.9 million extra to support people with disabilities to move from large residential facilities into community based services; \$2 million extra for in-home support; and \$2 million extra for development of crisis prevention strategies.

In essence, we have moved considerably over many years to make sure that people with disabilities in this State are catered for. This Government is passionate about making their lives better. In March 1997 the Community Services Commission undertook a study investigating the usage of respite care beds in New South Wales. This study identified that there were 149 respite beds occupied by people who had been in respite continuously for 90 days or more at the time the survey was undertaken. This study was released as part of a larger report in December 1998.

During 1999 and 2000 and into 2001, the Government has undertaken a number of major initiatives supported by budget allocations that have led to improvements in the provision of respite care. These are summarised as follows: \$4.6 million additional recurrent and \$1.1 million one-off for new additional respite care services in 1999-2000; a further

\$6.5 million recurrent for new respite services in 2000-01; an additional \$30.4 million recurrent in 2000-01 to develop long-term support options for individuals identified as being in crisis as at January 2000, and those identified as being at risk under the new service access system; and a one-off \$1.1 million to assist families who are unable to access centre-based respite during the peak summer holiday period of November 2000 to March 2001.

The provision of these funds has established 67 new non-government respite services across the State that offer flexible respite options; for example, home, holidays, weekends away, recreation, day and emergency respite, 24-hour out-of-home care and overnight stays. Of these 67 new services, 11 were Community Partner programs where local communities and services have contributed resources of their own to the new service.

The Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care reports that on 20 June 2001, 93 individuals were occupying respite care centre places beyond an initially agreed respite period. There are also 46 individuals who have been supported long term as permanent residents in large residential centres and who are now included in the current phase one of the Government's Devolution program due for completion in 2003. This group includes individuals who are inappropriately nominated as individuals in respite services by the Community Services Commissions in its 1998 report.

The Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care is in the process of identifying long-term supports in community-based accommodation for all these individuals, a process that cannot be rushed and has to be carried forward with consideration being given to each individual's support needs.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I got a lot of information about respite care services generally, but it appears that you have confirmed to me there are still 149 people blocking beds in respite care services. Have any of them during the last 12 months been able to be moved out of those services?

Ms HAMMERTON: Yes, of course. There was been quite a bit of movement out of blocked respite beds. The overall approach has been linked with a number of things. Clearly, we are committed to creating a service access system for people at risk.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I really have a short period of time. How many?

Ms HAMMERTON: Through the service access system a number of people have been provided with options. A whole lot of that money, \$20 million, was applied to interim arrangements to make sure that their needs were catered for. The bottom line is that it is difficult to give you an actual figure because as we went through the process of identifying which ones are blocked beds and which are not, it is a matter of definition. We are finalising putting in place a tracking system at the moment to make sure that we can give more accurate responses in the future.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Are you meaning to tell me that you allocated \$20 million for a specific purpose last year and you cannot tell me how much of that specific purpose you actually achieved?

Ms HAMMERTON: I can certainly tell you that \$14 million of the \$20 million also has been spent on the 197 individuals, a significant proportion of whom were in blocked respite beds. That money has been spent. So of the 40 children and young people involved, 30 per cent have new support arrangements; a set of proposals has been prepared for another 45 per cent; and 25 per cent are involved in further assessment or considerations of options for service provision.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: For your day-to-day management purposes how many people do you regard as being in blocked beds now?

Ms HAMMERTON: As we said, we gave you a status report. We said 93 individual were occupying respite care centre places beyond an initially agreed period and a proportion of people who have been deemed in the past, and that is why the definitional aspect is important, that are now considered to be part of the devolution program and are being attended to in that context. So a number of things have been happening.

We have identified \$20 million for a range of individuals who had been at risk and known to the system. That backlog is being worked through at the moment. That, combined with the introduction of a service access system, which

also brought others to the fore, means that to bring those sources of information together with the assistance of computer-based facilities is well and truly advanced.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: If the \$20 million allocated to freeing up blocked beds did not actually free up the blocked beds, what was it spent on?

Ms HAMMERTON: The \$20 million was allocated to both freeing up blocked beds and providing appropriate responses to people still in the community but known to be at risk.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I do not understand what that means.

Ms HAMMERTON: Well, the difference is this. Some were actually in services; some were not in services but were known to the system, either to my colleague in Disability Services or in the non-government parts of the system. So there are essentially two categories: the proportion who were supposedly blocking beds and in the system, and the rest of them who were known to us, who clearly were known as individuals because we had been through detailed processes to identify what their situations were. For the ones who are not in blocked beds, to whom the rest of the \$20 million has been applied, there has been a range of responses, depending on family circumstances and individual circumstances—

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Can I suggest that probably what appears to have happened is that the people who have been in respite care blocked beds have stayed there and you have found other individuals who do not have a service and you have given a service to them? Is that what has happened?

Ms HAMMERTON: No, it is certainly not what has happened. They have been letting the blocked respite beds go.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: But you do not know how many new respite beds have been freed up on top of that.

Ms HAMMERTON: Respite beds have been freed up. What I am telling you is that to accurately have an actual baseline picture requires a definitional agreement around how many were blocking respite beds.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: \$20 million is a lot of money. To have no bottom line of what you actually achieved for spending that is a bit difficult for me to comprehend.

Ms HAMMERTON: We have achieved a whole lot of movement; we have achieved a whole lot of interim responses to families who have been under pressure and are known to us.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Surely you must have a list of individuals who were in beds and are now in some other community-based service. Do you not have a list of individuals who were in the respite care beds who are now in the community-based services?

Ms HAMMERTON: We have information in a number of categories. What I am saying to you is that it is our job to try to bring them together with a common definition so that we know exactly where they are and so we know exactly what constitutes blocked-bed status, because there can be debate about that. How long is a blocking?

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I am none the wiser. Of the 400 people targeted as part of the devolution plan, how many of those have moved? If we are just using raw statistics, it would be useful to get some idea. It is a bit macabre, but I understand that some of the movement out of institutions occurs because the individuals die. It would be useful to distinguish the difference.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I am sure you would not want them to stay there.

Ms LO PO': Since first elected in 1995, the New South Wales Government has allocated in excess of \$22 million in individual recurrent funding to enable people with disabilities to progressively move from large residential centres to community-based accommodation. The current stage of the program involves relocating over 400 residents in large residential centres, including all children who will move from institutions into the community. This is being undertaken by the community living development unit, which was established and resourced to meet this objective.

Residents, families, advocates, guardians and staff of 11 large residential centres are currently working with the department's staff to plan future living arrangements for centre residents. These groups have identified time frames that will result in residents moving to community accommodation between now and June 2004. Several people within this project have moved to new living arrangements, including children moving into in-home support, while others are currently finalising planned moves to locations closer to family homes. In summary, three properties have been purchased, two are currently being renovated for residents of this program, and investigation of a further nine properties is under way. It will be necessary to roll over funds for capital, as exchange for the title may not be achieved before the end of the financial year.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Each of those properties would hold in the order of about four people on average. Is that right?

Ms LO PO': It depends.

Ms HAMMERTON: The situation is that the Government has not committed to rushing this process.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I understand there are difficulties about that.

Ms HAMMERTON: It involves the sensitivities of families and individuals.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Absolutely, but we do need to measure how it is going. We are up to 400 now. How many are you targeting to move by the end of the year?

Ms HAMMERTON: We are targeting to move within the first stage of the program, which is up until June 2004, all the people in that group. It is envisaged the children will all be out by next year, so the commitment is still there for mid-2004.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: By next year when we come to estimates we will probably want to ask you the same question. How will we determine whether you have been successful?

Ms HAMMERTON: Well, I could give you detail on each of the individual organisations.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: No, I just want to know what your target is for moving next year.

Ms HAMMERTON: The target is contingent on how families and individuals work through the process.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I understand they are flexible, and I will understand that next year, but I have no doubt that you are planning on some sort of a target. Would you care to inform the estimates committee how many are going to move during the course of this year?

Ms HAMMERTON: No, we are actually not planning on a target. We are planning on moving at the pace that we can manage in conjunction with the families and individuals with the full knowledge that the stage was planned over a four-year period, because that was indicative of a sensible period of time.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: You have told me you are looking at purchasing nine properties. Three have been purchased. If those three properties are fully occupied, how many will be affected?

Ms HAMMERTON: I will take on notice the number of individuals. The other opportunity that we have clearly in creating the demand management system through the service access system and responding to the ongoing needs of the individuals through that system—that is, the at-risk people who come forward—and through devolution is to look for opportunities to make sure that in terms of bringing the right people together in a group home or whatever their response is to those individuals—

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I really do understand those complexities but at the end of the day you are a person managing a program. You must be asking your staff, "How far are we through that program?"

Ms HAMMERTON: We are.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Where do you expect to be on that program in 12 months time?

Ms HAMMERTON: We develop regular reports for ourselves for management services and to our Minister around progress with negotiations, with identification of options and with purchases. Now, as I said, we could give a status report for each of the residential involved in this first stage of the program, which would give you the detail about the state of the consultation, how many families and individuals are at the point of making decisions, and from there you would get a cumulative picture of the situation. That is the safest way of doing it, but suffice it to say—

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Can we move on? We are a bit short of time so we might move on to another subject.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: How many school leavers with moderate to high support needs will graduate in New South Wales schools this year? How many of these school leavers will be provided with a post-school option or Adult Training, Learning and Support [ATLAS] placement and how are the placements to be funded?

Ms LO PO': Since 1995 the Government has committed over \$150 million to the provision of post-school support services for younger people with disabilities, especially those in the high support needs. This includes funding of over \$20 million to provide transitional training and support services for the 1999 and 2000 school leavers. The Government will provide services for 2001 school leavers with a disability. These services will assist school leavers to access training and employment. Funding is available to deliver on this commitment.

Funding will also be provided to assist those people who left school in 1999 and are nearing the end of the two-year ATLAS program. The ATLAS program and other day programs for people with disabilities are currently the subject of a review designed to develop a more integrated support system between employment and support programs funded by the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments. Reform of the program will help to improve the transition from education to employment for people with disabilities and will provide lifelong learning and vocational training opportunities. It will also assist people who do not have an employment goal to participate more fully in their community.

The New South Wales and Commonwealth governments have started developing collaborative initiatives to assist individuals with disabilities to obtain the services they need. Regardless of which level of government provides the funding, funding for these initiatives will continue in 2001-2002. Other collaborative Commonwealth State ventures include the national study on employment options for people who have high support needs and planning for the rural and remote pilot project. The 2001-2002 Federal budget allows for expansion of Commonwealth assistance in the area of employment assistance for people with disabilities.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: How many are you actually planning for in terms of the number of school leavers at the end of this year?

Ms HAMMERTON: Although we have an indicative number, we are planning through assessment of those who will leave school in September and October and once we have been through that process we will be clear about the numbers.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: You must have funding allocated in the budget for some target.

Ms HAMMERTON: We have.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: What is the target?

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: How many do you anticipate?

Ms HAMMERTON: We can take that on notice and give you the indicative number.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: There has been some criticism of the tendering process for disability services. Do you stand by the integrity of that process?

Ms LO PO': The Government wants to improve advocacy and information services for people with disabilities. We recognise that there is a continuum of service delivery across—

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Please, let us keep it short. There has been criticism of the tendering process. Do you stand by the integrity of the process? Do you believe it is fair and open, that it would stand scrutiny?

Ms LO PO': Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: There is no corruption; it is above board?

Ms LO PO': I understand that concerns have been raised about the probity of the process undertaken to date. From the outset, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu were appointed to provide probity oversight of the process. In particular, they were appointed to undertake reviews of accountability controls during the process.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Excellent. You will be aware of the article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 13 June under the headline "Disabled claims forwarded to ICAC"?

The Hon. RON DYER: Point of order: The manual prepared for members in connection with estimates committees, page 14, paragraph 4.2, fourth dot point, reads in part:

Questions asked as part of the budget estimates inquiries should not attempt to debate the unreported proceedings of other committee inquiries.

The position is, Mr Chairman, that this Committee, as you well know, is inquiring into systemic disability funding.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I am happy to drop the question.

CHAIR: I understand the point of order. The advice I have received from the Clerks is that it is not pertinent to ask questions dealing with the subject matter of an inquiry. The purpose of the budget estimates is to inquire into and report on the conduct of the Government and its policies for expenditure of public moneys authorised by the Parliament. In exercising this role, there is bound to be a degree of overlap with current committee inquiries. That is the advice I have received from the Clerks. There is no point of order.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Mr Chairman, would you please repeat the first sentence of that? What did you say? It is the Clerks advising?

CHAIR: This is the advice I have received from the Clerks to Chairs of general standing committees, that this does not prevent members from asking questions that deal with, et cetera. I have ruled on the matter.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Because of the interruption, I simply did not catch the first sentence which I think is the crucial sentence.

CHAIR: I will pass the paper to you.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The reference was to claims that there was a suboptimal process or corrupt conduct in the disabled tendering funding process. Minister, you are happy that that has not occurred?

Ms LO PO': I also understand that allegations have been raised about statements made by officers from the department and from my office to some organisations about the likely outcome of the expression of interest [EOI] from those organisations. These are serious allegations, and the Acting Director-General, Andrew Cappie-Wood, has referred these allegations to the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

I understand that concerns have also been raised about the decision to extend the deadline for the advocacy and information and expression of interest process. The decision to extend the deadline to 13 June followed representations

by the Disability Council about the delays in releasing the supplementary EOI information, the disadvantage that this had caused community organisations and the receipt of requests for extensions.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What date was Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu appointed?

Ms HAMMERTON: Before the process even got underway, so in other words before the EOI was advertised.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you know of any corrupt conduct personally, Minister, that gives basis to the story?

Ms LO PO': I know of no corrupt conduct.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Have any of the tenders been decided.

Ms LO PO': No tenders have yet been decided.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Have any committees come to conclusions?

Ms LO PO': No.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Have you announced any winning tenderers in any disability area?

Ms LO PO': Are we talking about the advocacy group?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: No, tenderers generally.

Ms LO PO': Expressions of interest are continuing in our department on an ongoing basis so, of course, we have made announcements.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Some of them have been announced?

Ms LO PO': You have to be more specific.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Some of the disability service tenders?

Ms LO PO': It is an ongoing process.

Ms HAMMERTON: The EOI process has been rolling out throughout the year, primarily post the Olympics and Paralympics, that period obviously being difficult. We are at the stage now where virtually all funds have been committed through either direct allocation or the EOI process.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The process, presumably, is that the service is assessed by a team of public servants and then you confirm and announce that. Is that the process?

Ms LO PO': That is correct.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In each case has the one you announced been the same one as the committee decided on?

Ms LO PO': From time to time there is an alteration. From time to time, yes, new information comes to our notice.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If that happens, is the reason for the change very transparently transmitted? Is the recommendation and the reason for the non-acceptance of that recommendation and the announcement of some other group made public?

Ms LO PO: I am not sure what happens to the file when it leaves my office. It goes back to the department, so I am not sure what arrangements are then made.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If there were a process of assessment that was presumably done by appointed people from the department who were presumably experts in the field, and it came up with a winning tenderer in their opinion, would not that mean that it would be very—

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Point of order: Mr Chair, I would have thought that asking questions about hypothetical situations was not part of the inquiry into the budget process. The question seems to be, "If there was an assessment process", and "If this happened," and "If something else happened". I fail to see how that relates to the budget process.

CHAIR: Yes, I take your point. I think it should be reworded.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In cases where the committee—

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I think he is still being pretty hypothetical.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In cases where the committee has decided on one winning tenderer and the one announced is not the winning tenderer, does the process involve a very careful description, and public description, of why the tender that the committee recommended has been not preferred and the other one has been preferred?

CHAIR: That is better.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: You can work out the difference, can you?

Ms HAMMERTON: I will make a comment, if that is okay. The whole EOI process has been developed over time with the support of external scrutiny so that we are working always to improve the practice of the process so that it does continue to stand up to scrutiny. What happens is that the panels put their recommendations to the Minister in a form that gives the Minister, usually because the processes involve a number of selections at the same time, a list of possible successful applicants so the Minister can choose to decide within the dollars available the first two, the first three, the first four of what is recommended. She always makes a decision along those lines. She makes a decision within the advice available to her.

There is some room to move, clearly, but they are all recommended providers that have passed the test. They have been through the scrutiny process; they have provided an EOI; they have been through the panel process; any further information that is able to be gathered has been gathered.

Once the Minister has made her decision, that comes back to the department. We inform both the successful and unsuccessful applicants about that decision, and we offer the unsuccessful applicants immediate access to the convener of the panel concerned to talk through the reasons why they may not have been successful.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: If I may pursue Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans' questions, in the event that you submit to the Minister three or four groups for her to choose, is it possible that she would choose the one that is the favourite, which may act to the prejudice of one group against the other?

Ms HAMMERTON: There is no prejudice in this process in that a whole lot of providers have responded.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: You give the Minister four groups of people. The Minister then has to get two amounts of funding out of four. It is then that the Minister has the discretion to pick one of the four.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Point of order: To repeat the point of order taken before, we are now getting into totally hypothetical questions.

CHAIR: I think the Hon. Dr Peter Wong is going to the issue of how a decision process occurs, and that is not just a particular decision but a series of decisions—in other words, what is government policy and what is departmental policy on the decision to award or not award a tender. I think that is perfectly in order.

Ms LO PO': I think it would be useful if we gave Dr Peter Wong or the Committee a copy of the tender process so that the members could see exactly what was said and what the steps are that need to be taken. That might be more useful.

CHAIR: What he is asking, Minister, is once the department has completed the assessment of the tender processes and it goes into the Minister's office for the Minister to make decisions, and once those decisions are taken, what steps occur after that? I think Ms Hammerton has actually gone to that, but if you could explain what happens within the Minister's office, it would be helpful.

Ms LO PO': Within the Minister's office I make a decision and send it back to the department.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Mr Chair, that has not answered my question at all. I am talking, for example, as the chairperson of an organisation that has received funding in the past. For example, if there are two amounts of funding available for certain services and the department can recommended all successful tenderers or organisations, whatever they are, the Minister can pick two out of four and then the Minister can exercise discretion.

CHAIR: I think the Minister has answered the question. The Minister simply makes the decision and does not have to give reasons. Is that correct?

Ms LO PO': I make my decision on advice that I have, and I send the file back to the department.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: My next question is in regard to Disability Services. The estimates report indicates that "more appropriate prevention programs" to support individuals to remain in the community would be established. What were the identified problems associated with the previous programs that have been designated as inappropriate? How do the new programs correct those deficiencies?

Ms HAMMERTON: I will attempt to answer that question. An amount of \$5 million was allocated last year, and there is additional money, or continuing money, of that order this year to support the development of a range of prevention initiatives in recognition that there is not much point just trying to tackle the crisis end of the system when, clearly, families of individuals with disabilities need support from day one.

In a whole range of ways through the additional investment in the intervention in therapy, in a range of preschool services, the Government is investing in preventive options. Further to that, though, one of the initiatives that we got funding for last year was to create local support co-ordinators in communities in recognition that families sometimes need to be connected into solutions to support them through what might be difficult times although, in general, they clearly want to keep their responsibility of looking after their son or daughter.

Eight such local support co-ordinators have been put in place already and are now functioning in various parts of the State. We are just forming some further advice to put to the Minister about the further expansion of that program, given that the experience in Western Australia in particular is that such a preventive measure makes a considerable difference to the capacity of a family to continue to cope and live in the community.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Minister, the strategic directions for the Home Care Service of New South Wales list a series of focus directions on page 5-15 of Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 1. All of these are in a business model internally focused on the provider, that is, the department as a business unit, including a focus on securing new business opportunities in the field of home-based community care, staff and departmental development and administrative cost reductions. There is no mention of customer requirements or outcomes.

What priority in the strategic directions or focus has been given to external—that is, customer—outcomes? Has the department adopted a top-down pyramid business approach or bottom-up pyramid business approach?

Ms LO PO': Mike Hetherington is the General Manager of Home Care.

Mr HETHERINGTON: The Home Care Service is, indeed, customer focused. All the strategies that we have put in place in the strategic directions are aimed at, first, improving service to these people who receive service in terms of quality and quantity. To underscore the strategic direction, we establish a rigorous process of corporate planning using as a starting point data from clients. That, in turn, is underscored by a comprehensive client satisfaction survey, which we run and have run each year for the past five years.

Last year, for example, the satisfaction rate of Home Care clients was in excess of 96 per cent. We look very closely at the 4 per cent dissatisfaction and cater our programs to accommodate those particular needs. So whilst there is a strong business focus, I submit there cannot be a strong business focus without primarily a strong client focus. Home Care in the coming year will deliver an additional 419,000 hours and, indeed, that will represent the biggest level of care that Home Care has ever delivered in its 58-year history.

Ms HAMMERTON: I might add that from the funder perspective, the new department, we will continue to have an agreement with the Home Care Service, which is one of many providers, be it a government or non-government provider, and in the context of that agreement we are looking for quality and quantity indicators and are looking for the kinds of results that Mike has just alluded to.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: The estimates state that reductions in workers compensation premiums will allow a greater face-to-face service provision. The department is to be congratulated on this trend and commitment, but may I ask how much it has saved in workers compensation premium and, secondly, what practical difference or implications will this have for those who care for the disabled, frail, aged or chronically ill people in the community?

Mr HETHERINGTON: Mr Chair, in 1999-2000, the Home Care workers compensation deposit premium was \$12.48 million. In the year about to be completed, that is 2000-2001, our deposit premium was \$10.9 million, a reduction of \$1.58 million. For 2001-02, the premium will be \$8.8 million as advised by the Treasury Managed Fund. Therefore, in the last year, Home Care will have reduced its compensation deposit premium by \$2.1 million and since 1999-2000 by \$3.68 million or a 29.5 per cent decrease in premium over two years.

We have been able to achieve that by carrying out what we term the Safe Care program. It owes its success to the continual efforts and focus by all Home Care employees. The program continues to be an outstanding success in terms of employee safety. In the current financial year there has already been a reduction of more than 18 per cent in workplace injuries compared with last year and a 36 per cent reduction in injuries compared with 1999-2000. This will, all things being equal, translate into a reduction in workers compensation premiums in coming years and, therefore, corresponding increase in service delivery. Having said that, we are very mindful of the need to provide our staff with clear guidelines on how to provide services safely that meet client needs as well.

The Hon. RON DYER: Minister, you could possibly be aware that I am patron of a children's disability organisation known as Life Start. Could you advise the Committee what improvements are being made to support services for children with disabilities and those children's families?

Ms LO PO': I thank you for the question. Reform of disability services in New South Wales is taking place under the theme of living in the community. It is about allowing people with a disability to live active lives as participants in their local communities. In line with this theme, I was delighted to announce earlier today a package of grants totalling \$1.2 million designed to encourage innovation in services for children with a disability and for their families and carers. The grants will allow organisations in New South Wales to lead the way in supporting disabled children, their families and their carers.

The Government knows that carefully structured but flexible services for children with a disability are vital to allow those children to meet their full potential and to lead active lives in their communities. We want to encourage the growth of supports that have links in mainstream services. Parents are telling us that they want their children to have the same opportunities and the same services as other children in the community. That is why this \$1.2 million innovation package is so important. It will allow organisations to model new ways of providing services and supports to families to achieve this very result.

The Carr Government wants to ensure that accessible, community-based support services are made available to families from the time of their children's birth until they leave school through programs that integrate family supports, therapy and education. Here in Sydney two wonderful community-based groups, Life Start and Learning Links, will

receive direct grants in the initial allocations with this objective in mind. The funding will be dedicated to the development of programs for school-age children and young people, building on both organisations' existing early intervention services for children aged eight to six.

All too frequently, supports for children with disabilities and their families are fragmented in the community with artificial separations at preschool and school-age services. This funding will help change all that. Both Learning Links and Life Start also have successful track records in independently developing resources and attracting strong support from their local communities and private businesses. The Government acknowledged that this is extending its support to them.

Some of the funding will also be allocated to enabling both services, in partnership with the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, to share their expertise with the communities and services across New South Wales. Life Start is a community-based program that is operated by families for families. The sorts of services it offers in the Sydney region include baby programs, play groups, special purpose groups, a schools support program and individual home-based assistance for families. It will receive \$220,000 to expand its services in Clovelly, Marrickville and the Hornsby-Ryde area to include school-age children with a disability. It will also receive a one-off payment of \$100,000 to build an administration centre at Hornsby.

Learning Links will receive \$150,000 to run a comprehensive program that supports young people with disabilities at school in southern Sydney. It will also receive a one-off grant of \$200,000 to upgrade its facilities at Peakhurst. Its services include full cognitive and developmental assessments, individualised and supplementary teaching services, specialised help for children who have serious illnesses, and occupational and speech therapy for family counselling.

Grants of \$450,000 are also been made available to groups in regional New South Wales to set up school-age programs for children with a disability using the same approach. These grants are another sign of the Government's commitment to reform in disability services. The focus of these reforms is an approach that supports people with a disability to participate fully in their local communities through accessing the same services as other members of the community.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Minister, I refer you to Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 1, page 5-50. The Home Care Service is budgeting for an increase in service of 419,000 hours compared to the projected results for the financial year 2000-01. What is the reason for this increase and who will benefit from the additional output?

Ms LO PO': This budget is at an all-time high in terms of hours. There are two main reasons for the Home Care Service being added to increase its service levels. The first relates to the deductions that Home Care has been able to achieve in its operating cost. The second is the additional revenue achieved, mainly through the introduction of the new Veterans Home Care program, a Commonwealth Department of Veteran's Affairs program initiative.

Home Care has been able to achieve significant reductions to its operating costs through improved work practices, particularly with regard to occupational health and safety. In the year about to be completed Home Care's deposit premium for workers compensation was \$10.9 million, a reduction of \$1.58 million on the previous year. For 2001-02 the deposit premium will be \$8.8 million, a further reduction of \$2.1 million.

Home Care is improving its work practices in other areas through the introduction of a new service delivery model. This has seen, and will continue to see, reductions in the administrative overheads and a consequential increase in funds available for direct service delivery. In the coming financial year the Home Care Service is expected to generate in excess of \$10 million worth of revenue from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. This will have an immediate effect on Home Care being able to increase services in every corner of New South Wales.

It is estimated that an additional 9,000 clients will be able to be assisted. In the coming year, Home Care expects to assist 54,000 people, who will receive in excess of 4.2 million hours of service. This level of activity is the highest in Home Care's 58-year history. Home Care expects that every region throughout New South Wales will benefit from this increased output.

CHAIR: That is very good.

Ms LO PO': It is. It is an excellent story.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Mr Chairman, can I table a document? Minister, can I show the same document to you? For the benefit of Hansard, the document is entitled "Submission" and it is from the Ageing and Disability Department. Minister, I show you an ADD document regarding tendering. Is that your signature on the second page of this document?

CHAIR: Have you sought leave to table that document?

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Sorry.

CHAIR: Is leave granted?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: All we know so far is that this document is headed "Submission".

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I am happy not to table it, but I am sure members of the Committee would like to see it.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: We would like to know something about it.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I just do not have multiple copies.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Well, why don't you?

CHAIR: Does the Committee accept the document? That is what we will vote on.

The Hon. RON DYER: Mr Chairman, it is hardly reasonable to accept a document we do not know the nature of.

CHAIR: You can have a look at the document before you vote on it if it makes a difference.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Yes, we would like to have a look.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: While we are determining the rest of the issues about the document, Minister, is that your signature on the second page?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Hang on a minute. Do we not have a motion before the Committee?

CHAIR: No, that is whether it gets tabled or not. He can still ask questions about the document.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Is that your signature on the second page next to the initials of Mr Warwick Neilley? Can you tell the Committee what effect your signature has next to the word "approved"? Is it a fact that this document essentially approves an amount of \$824,000 or thereabouts to Central Coast Flexible Support Options for Aged and Disability Services?

What happened after you approved the department's recommendation to fund that support group? Was it you or Warwick Neilley who interfered with the next step of the funding process, delivering nearly \$1 million to a different organisation? Has this matter been referred to the ICAC?

The Hon. RON DYER: Point of order: I took a similar point of order earlier, which I understand and accept was overruled. However, the critical word in the passage I quoted to you was "debate". The question should not attempt to debate the unreported proceedings of other committee inquiries. Now I would put it to you that the question in the form put by the Hon. John Ryan is highly argumentative. It does debate the whole matter. If the Opposition wished to raise the matter, the proper venue to do so was during the inquiry into the disability funding reference.

CHAIR: As I understand it, the question—and this is what I wanted to clarify—was, "Is this your signature? Is that Mr Neilley's signature? Does that, in fact, allocate certain amounts of money? Were there steps taken after that to

deliver more money than that? Has this matter been referred to ICAC?" That does not necessarily go to the issue, because the tender process, which is the committee's inquiry, is not involved in this process whatsoever, and because they are statements of fact, I will allow the question to continue.

Ms LO PO: Mr Chairman, the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care recently managed an expression of interest process for awarding the funding of a new flexible option service for people with disabilities on the Central Coast. The acting director-general has advised me that a service that was unsuccessful in obtaining this funding is unhappy with the outcome and is seeking a review. I understand that they have complained to the Ombudsman, as they are entitled to do. This matter is now before the Ombudsman to consider.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Did you initially approve funding to that group identified on that page in front of you?

Ms LO PO: Mr Chairman, I have a scrappy piece of photostat, and there is a very faint signature on it that resembles mine.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I have a better copy. Does that indicate that you approved the funding for that organisation? How did it lose its funding?

Ms LO PO: Mr Chairman, this matter is now before the Ombudsman, and we are awaiting the outcome of that.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: But did you approve it? That should not be before the Ombudsman. Did you approve funding to that Central Coast group?

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Point of order: I have been provided with a copy of the document from the Hon. John Ryan and I would like to point out that there is no way that I can connect the second page of the document. I do not think it is appropriate for the Minister to be asked to provide that.

CHAIR: My understanding is that the Minister was shown a document. The question the honourable member asked was did she approve—not necessarily was that her signature—funding to that organisation. That is a different question from whether the document is real or not real.

Ms LO PO: I do not see the word "approved" here. I see another word that looks like "supported", but I sign thousands of documents, and I would have to review the files before I could see what this means.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: You do not recall giving approval of \$1 million to this group on the Central Coast?

Ms LO PO: It is a \$1.1 million organisation.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Point of order: We have been given a document. The first page ends with a series of paragraphs. The third paragraph clearly finishes. The paragraph is ended. The second page we have been given starts with the word "approved", a small "a" in the middle of a sentence. In other words there is no apparent connection whatsoever between the first sheet and the second sheet.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I am not referring to the document; I am asking the Minister does she recall having approved—

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I have not finished, Mr Chair. On the second page there are also over on one side, on the left-hand side, handwritten notes which clearly refer to multiple organisations, but the front part of each of those handwritten points is missing from the document. The entire thing that has been presented before us just simply does not hang together. I really think that it is objectionable to ask a series of questions based on a purported document when, quite clearly on the face of it, this page is not page 2 of this document.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I am not asking about the document, Mr Chairman. I am simply asking does the Minister recall approving \$824,000, which is nearly \$1 million, to an organisation called Central Coast Flexible Support Options for Aged and Disability Services to commence on 1 April 2001. Does she recall doing that.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Further to the point of order—

CHAIR: I will now rule on the points of order. The issue, as the member has restated in his question, does not necessarily relate to that document and, therefore, is a separate question and should be dealt with in that way.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: We did not come down in the last shower. When a document is passed around which has a reference on the first unsigned page to the document he is referring to and then has what purports to be a signature on the second page—

CHAIR: I think the Hon. Jan Burnswoods is going to the issue of whether or not we accept the document.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: No I am not. I am referring to a question being based on false pretences.

CHAIR: You have now put it into context and I think everyone now understands that, but I have ruled on the point of order.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Point of order: My understanding was that you were going to allow the Hon. John Ryan to ask one supplementary question after the Government's time had expired. He is now on his third question. When are you going to impose a reasonable limit on the questions he is asking?

CHAIR: The Minister has undertaken to provide an answer. Is that agreed to?

Ms LO PO': Yes.

CHAIR: That is the end of that.

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: Does the Minister recall—

CHAIR: No, no more questions. We now move to the substantive issue of whether the document be accepted for tabling. Does the Committee accept the document to be tabled?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Could we please clarify, Mr Chair? I am not sure how many members the Opposition need, but there are three Opposition members at the table. Two of them voted.

CHAIR: We need a show of hands for the ayes, a show of hands for the noes—the ayes have it.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Could I ask a question?

CHAIR: Certainly.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: You have referred to that as being a vote on the acceptance of the document. I return to the earlier question I asked. Clearly, there is no connection in the document between the second page and the first page. May I ask what actually constitutes a document? The motion you have put before us perhaps should refer to two pages, two items, two pieces of paper. You are taking it on faith that what we have before us is a page that finishes at the end of one paragraph and another page that starts in the middle of a sentence is a document—

CHAIR: The document referred to clearly indicates the document that the Hon. Ron Dyer sought to see and he saw it in its—

The Hon. JOHN RYAN: I am perfectly happy to put on the record that I tabled two pieces of paper.

CHAIR: The document referred to is two pieces of paper. Let the resolution so refer to it. We will now deal with the issue of women. Are there any questions for the Minister in her portfolio of Minister for Women?

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Yes, Mr Chairman. Minister, when you put your bids into Treasury this year, did you request an increase in the allocation of funds for the Women's Grants program? If so, how much did you seek and if not, why not?

Ms LO PO': At Treasury meetings before the budget I am always seeking more money for all my departments. That is the way Ministers work. We would have preferred to get more money. The precise amount I will get back to you, but certainly we are always looking for more money.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Are you able to explain why the Government has not increased the Women's Grants program in real terms or otherwise; why it has simply not increased the funding for the whole of the life of this Government?

Ms LO PO': Women's programs, as you probably understand, are not ongoing. They are a one-off. They go to different groups every year, so it is not as though people need the money to sustain the program. These programs occur one off. We do not refund. That is part of the deal. They have to be completed within the year. So this is about spreading one million dollars every year over a different group of people.

The need to keep bumping this up, as it were, to keep the programs going is not an issue. It is about every year this Government recognising the needs of women and giving a million dollars to groups of women in New South Wales in either large or small grants, but there is no pressure on the Government to continue refunding one group. In fact, the criteria is that you cannot be refunded and in this way over several years we have given many groups money to enable them to make changes in their community and we will continue to do so.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Will the Minister take any questions on notice?

CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to take questions on notice? It has been the practice with past estimates committees to deliver those questions by 5 p.m. on Monday, to be returned four weeks after that. I do not know how many questions there will be, but it will not be a large number from the Opposition.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: We do have some.

CHAIR: Will you be happy to take those?

Ms LO PO': Yes.

CHAIR: I will arrange for you to be given a timetable for these questions and answers.

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.