

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

**INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN AND
WATERLOO**

At Sydney on Wednesday 3 November 2004

The Committee met at 1.30 p.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. J. C. Burnswoods (Chair)

The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans

The Hon. K. F. Griffin

The Hon. R. M. Parker

The Hon. G. S. Pearce

The Hon. I. W. West

DENNIS BARRY SMITH, Police Commander, Redfern Police Command, Turner Street, Redfern, on former oath:

CHAIR: Did you receive the Committee's questions?

Mr SMITH: Yes.

CHAIR: As you know, the questions fall under a series of headings, including drug crime, relationship between police and the Aboriginal community, and so on. First, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr SMITH: No. I addressed the Committee on the last occasion, so I am quite happy to take questions.

CHAIR: The first three questions relate to drug crime. We make the comment that several submissions to the inquiry have emphasised the problem of drug-related crime in the broader local area command [LAC] but in the Block in particular. Can you give us an indication of the extent of the problem and whether you think the LAC has adequate resources to police drug-related crime?

Mr SMITH: Since my last visit here we have made some substantial inroads into organised crime in and around the Redfern area, particularly in the drug trade predominantly in and around the Block. As I mentioned last time, Redfern and Waterloo were the two main suburbs where heroin supply was of some concern to us, and we have made some substantial inroads. We conducted a six-month undercover operation, which obviously I could not divulge on my last appearance because we were halfway through it. Through that operation we arrested approximately 35 drug suppliers in and around the Redfern and Waterloo area. That has placed a major dent on the drug trade in Redfern and Waterloo.

We have subsequently returned to nearby locations and conducted another four search warrants, and we have found nowhere near the amount of drugs. We have found some small-level supply of heroin, but nowhere near the quantity and availability that was there six months ago. In relation to adequate resources, since our last appearance here the Minister has announced the 32 initiatives and strategies for Redfern LAC, and part of that enhanced policing package has provided the command with additional resources in terms of material and also people.

Six additional detectives have been seconded to work on drug and robbery crime in the area, five additional senior police have been recruited to the general duties staff, and Operation Concertina, which is high-visibility policing, has been expanded from 12 to 20 officers. They work basically around the clock in the CBD and the hotspot locations. Taking into account the work we have done and the enhanced policing packages, Redfern command has probably never been in a stronger position to tackle the issues that confront us. We have not dealt with all the problems yet, but we are certainly heading in the right direction.

CHAIR: Because you have mentioned that 35 suppliers were arrested, I might ask question 3 before question 2. A number of people have expressed frustration that when dealers are arrested they are virtually immediately released on bail. Can you give us any statistical or other comments on what has happened, for example, since the raids you spoke about?

Mr SMITH: Yes, I could probably talk about my jurisdiction. In terms of the people who are arrested for supplying drugs in Redfern, most are refused bail, or placed on conditional bail at the least. The people that the community believe to be on bail would be on bail from the various courts throughout the State, and the majority of police who come into contact with high-risk offenders will say that most of those people are on bail not from a police jurisdiction but from a court of some description.

CHAIR: So it is true that quite a high percentage of people who have been arrested and charged are on bail. Are you saying, however, that it is not something over which you necessarily have control?

Mr SMITH: Yes. It would certainly be true that a lot of the high-risk offenders that we deal with, the repeat offenders, are on bail, but not from initial police bail. Most of the time they are bail refused, or there are very strict conditions placed upon them.

CHAIR: But when they go to the court for their first appearance—

Mr SMITH: Yes, or subsequent appearances, or a higher court. That is obviously a totally different jurisdiction to police, so I cannot comment on that.

CHAIR: Given the evidence that has been given and the submissions that have been made to us by local people, both before and since our interim report and the raids you have spoken about, people seem to feel that even though they can point out who the dealers are, it often seems that they continue to be around and highly visible. I guess the frustration here is that police do not seem to be actually arresting them.

Mr SMITH: There are a couple of points here. Often when people provide us with information, it is just that: information. It is probably not put up to the next level, what we would perhaps call intelligence. After we receive information from members of the public, we then compile some evidence in our intelligence offices to see whether or not that particular information is worth following through.

I might say that there is strong evidence to suggest that we do follow through on the information, because 90 per cent of the information we get about drug arrests does come from members of the community. Last year we arrested 36 people for drug supply in Redfern; so far this calendar year we have arrested over 100 people for drug supply, and there will be more to come before the end of December. I think that those quantitative figures themselves suggest that police are acting on the information that is provided to us.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: With regard to drug-related crime, do you have any comments to make about the recent announcement to close a needle dispensing van and set up an alternative structure in Lawson Street?

Mr SMITH: I have not been across the information, although I have read the press releases. Beyond that, I think there are attempts to improve that area of Redfern and Waterloo, and I am quite keen to entertain any new strategies to improve life on the Block for the Aboriginal community and the decent Aboriginal families who live there. This could well be a step.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Do you think that that location will be appropriate?

Mr SMITH: I have not physically inspected the area. I roughly know Lawson Street where the building is, but I probably have not done enough research to make an informed comment to the Committee on that.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Are there any drug houses left on the Block or in the vicinity of the Block?

Mr SMITH: Using your definition, there probably would not be any under that definition of "drug house legislation". There may still be one or two that people are using to supply a small amount of heroin. We raided the Block probably two weeks ago, and one of the houses that was selling a small amount of heroin was raided, and arrests were made and drugs were seized—but nowhere near the quantities that were moving from the Block six months ago.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Last time you appeared I think we could say that you very loyally defended resource levels and staffing levels and then, of course, when other evidence came out the Minister acted with this package and extra staffing and so on. Are there any areas now that you would say are still problem areas in Redfern LAC? Have all the initiatives that were announced by the Minister been delivered?

Mr SMITH: Yes, the majority of those 32 initiatives have been. There are some that are structured—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Some of them are ongoing, I know.

Mr SMITH: Yes, the ongoing, but the tangible ones that we certainly can use quickly and appropriately at the command have been delivered and well received by all the staff.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: You would have read Sergeant Reitano's evidence in relation to lack of staff to investigate crime with people being on leave and so on. We heard that at the end of the day there might have been only one person doing investigations. Has the situation been rectified now? Can you tell us what the situation is now with detectives and investigations, particularly covering that issue of people being on leave?

Mr SMITH: Yes. Probably to take you back a step, I did read some of Frank's submission and that was probably capturing a moment in time as opposed to a broad picture of rostering across a fortnight. It was a very small circle of a roster over a fortnight. Generally those sorts of issues would not occur in a fortnight's roster. Having said that, the six new investigators that have been seconded have been of great assistance. We have three detective sergeant positions currently under advertisement, being interviewed and will be filled by Christmas. Those senior positions in that investigator's office places us in a much stronger position to tackle, basically, the serious crime of drug dealing and distribution, and of robberies. So, yes, much tighter and a more improved and efficient office.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Just on the Coburn report, there was an unanswered question, certainly in my mind, after the first appearances by Mr Waites and you as to what happened in terms of the command on the night of the riot. Is that any closer to being resolved as to the problems of lack of communication and so on that night?

CHAIR: Before you answer I should mention we have had this difficulty because those matters are not included in our terms of reference. In a broader sense, obviously, they relate to strategies and resources, but we are not here—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It is in evidence.

CHAIR: I know I have said this on numerous occasions previously, but our inquiry and even more so in the second stage is not into those matters. They were specifically excluded from our terms of reference.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: We have had significant—

CHAIR: You may want to think your answer in the broader terms since the changes that have been made.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: We have had significant evidence on that.

CHAIR: We are not here—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I am asking on evidence.

CHAIR: Well, I am sorry, Mr Pearce, but I can only repeat—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I am asking it on the evidence.

CHAIR: You know as well as I do, but you continue to try it. We are not here to inquire into those matters—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I do not try anything. I am asking the superintendent to comment on it.

CHAIR: —because they are not in our terms of reference. But, certainly, the superintendent may well wish to comment in terms of the changes that have been announced or made in terms of the structure and staffing and so on of the LAC.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I am sure he could answer for himself.

Mr SMITH: In terms of the Coburn report, I have read both parts of the Coburn report and there are a number of recommendations into the way we deal with civil unrest, and I take those recommendations on board.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Since May, when we last spoke, we talked about the police relationship with the Aboriginal community. How are things going now? Do you think things have improved at all?

Mr SMITH: Things are certainly on the mend since the issues of February, and properly getting back to where we were prior to those unfortunate incidents. I am confident that the relationships in the community between the police and the majority of the Aboriginal people are sound.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: We are still getting comments such as those from the Koori interagency group, and we spoke with a number of young people last week who still express concern. Why do you think they have that view, and if, in your view, that is not the case why do you think they continue to hold that view? Is it historical or is it based on some evidence?

Mr SMITH: A couple of points. We are probably jumping into an area of the committee, which I will talk on later. It may answer some of those issues where some of the young people have brought forward their ideas and we are working through to action those. But I certainly think there are some historical issues that have always, apparently, seemed to be there between young people and Redfern police. We are certainly working as hard as we can with the mentoring program, the PCYC and other activities that we have going to break down those relationships and talk to the kids about what the police role is in society as well. And they talk a bit about cultural training for police, which we are actioning and a perceived issue that the young people get spoken to more because they are of an indigenous background.

We talk to them about the police role and what that might be and why that perception is there. Again, it is ongoing at I think we are certainly making some inroads. I think a couple of things are important there in relation to the overall cohesiveness of the area. We just had 5,000 Aboriginal people turn up to Redfern for four days in October for the Aboriginal Knock Out on the long weekend, which was perceived as going to be a troubled weekend far and wide. We worked with the Aboriginal planners for some three months on that, very tightly, and there was not one major incident to speak of out of that weekend in terms of crimes being committed in and around Redfern, any violence towards either party or anything.

So I think that is testimony that relationships have improved. We are not going to get 5,000 people visiting the town for another 12 months anyway, when it comes back. But in terms of young people, we are doing as much as we can. I think you will see on some of the later questions that the youth officers and the part-time police on the mentoring program are really starting to make some inroads. Redfern did have some of the highest figures for charging young people, on an evidence base of course. And we have certainly dropped from being number one in the State to about 10 or 11, so that strongly suggests that young people are not getting into trouble as much. Police are using other options in terms of cautions or conferencing or warnings to the young people, so that is a positive step as well.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: That does answer some of our other questions. In terms of relationships with the Aboriginal community, we have had a lot of evidence from the ACLOs. I was just wondering whether you could clarify this, we have been told there is one position vacant, one is on sick leave, one is on secondment, leaving only one ACLO working in the area. Is that right and, if so, what steps are you taking to fill those vacancies?

Mr SMITH: One ACLO, yes, Lesley Townsend is working, operational at the moment. We have two other ACLOs that are off on sick leave at the moment. We have a fourth position, which is vacant, under recruitment. Last week we were given sign-off by the Minister to advertise against the two people who are off sick. On 9 November all three positions will be attempted to be recruited against. We only have a small selection field because we only had one job to recruit against at that time. We now have three. So the possibility is with successful applicants all three will be filled on 9 November, which will give me four ACLOs. I am really looking forward to having a full team and being able to do a lot more than we can with just one person on the ground.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Is that four ACLOs plus the two that are on sick leave?

Mr SMITH: No. Sorry, we are standing the two aside who are on sick leave and whilst their matters are proceeding in terms of their future we can recruit against them, so we have been given a ministerial go-ahead to recruit against them because they may not be back for the long term. I need ACLOs on the ground now doing a job. So I will have the opportunity to have four ACLOs working at Redfern in the not too distant future.

CHAIR: Is recruitment of ACLOs very difficult?

Mr SMITH: We did attempt to recruit two months ago. We did not have any applicants at the standard, and this is a second go to recruit that original vacant position. So the pool of applicants this time does seem to be a lot more fruitful.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: You have already got the applications, have you?

Mr SMITH: Yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: So you are going to be deciding on that?

Mr SMITH: Yes, sorry. Interviews on 9 November.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: One of the ACLOs in the transcript on 24 September said, "The police actually rammed the young kid. I've had my house burned down as a result of this crap that has gone on. I've had death threats stating to stay away from the inquiry, and you may ask who from, the police." There are two issues there, the belief the police rammed TJ's bike, which, I believe, was dealt with in the Coroner's inquiry. Would you have any comment on that?

Mr SMITH: Only to reaffirm what you indicated there, that that matter was dealt with in the Coroner's Court and there was a finding.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: There was a finding that that was not the case.

Mr SMITH: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: And the other one is the death threat to the ACLO. My understanding is that the death threat did not relate to the circumstances of the Redfern riot, it antedated that. Is that correct, or do you not know?

Mr SMITH: Perhaps my only comment there would be that I am aware there is a current investigation in relation to those allegations that the Police Service is conducting. I probably could not comment any further than that at this stage.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So it is being, the—

Mr SMITH: The allegations are being investigated.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The Wilkinson allegations against the police are being investigated?

Mr SMITH: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: And who is investigating that?

Mr SMITH: I am not sure of investigator's name, but there is a—

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But is it the police or the Police Integrity Commission?

Mr SMITH: My understanding is the police service.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The police?

Mr SMITH: Yes.

CHAIR: The Minister, I think, made an announcement a couple of days after that hearing that an investigation was to be undertaken.

Mr SMITH: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The ACLOs have stated that they were not informed the riot was occurring, is that correct?

CHAIR: Again, can I just make the point that I made to Greg Pearce? I think you are going beyond our terms of reference, and in fairness to Greg Pearce, because I have made this point over and over again, the actual events, particularly those events on the day of the riot and so on, are not in our terms of reference.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Madam Chair, that is part of the questioning that we have here that was distributed to Superintendent Smith.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If I could just respond, the relationship between the ACLOs and the police is obviously pretty important.

CHAIR: Yes, it certainly is.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If the ACLOs were not informed about the riot in the area that they are responsible for, that is serious and that is an allegation made by them in evidence to us, is my memory of what it was. It is evidence we have already received about the subject that I think, given that it is police-community relations, is within our terms of reference.

CHAIR: We have prepared a question and this is an issue we have to be careful about. Our question No. 14 is specifically referring to the Coburn report and the section that deals with Superintendent Smith by name, which relates to the fact that he did not call them out because he believed that the community did not think highly of them and that Redfern officers were sceptical of them. Those issues, I certainly think, are within our terms of reference. But, again, I can only say that, as you know because of amendments you had before the Legislative Council, the events leading up to the riot in that very specific sense are not within our terms of reference, and this issue has been thrashed out over and over again.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But you cannot have it both ways. If my question is too similar to 14 and it is beyond our terms of reference—

CHAIR: No, I did not say it was too similar, no.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It cannot be both, can it?

CHAIR: No, I said—

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You are saying it is similar to 14, which it is and it is beyond the terms of reference. It cannot be both, can it?

CHAIR: No, I said that 14 is within our terms of reference because it is raised in terms of the references in the Coburn report to Superintendent Smith's view about relations between the community and the ACLOs and the ACLOs and the police. The questions about who told who what and when, I am saying, I not within our terms of reference.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I put it to you my question is almost identical—

CHAIR: I am not arguing that.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: —to question 14. In fact, if you like, I will ask question 14.

CHAIR: Okay. That is my suggestion. Let us deal with question 14.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I think you are splitting a hair here.

CHAIR: We have terms of reference. Do you want to make it as question 14?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: We will make it question 14. It is about informing the ACLOs.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Question 14, if I could just read it out so we all know what we are talking about, the Coburn report states that you considered calling the ACLOs during the right, but you believe that the community does not think highly of them and that Redfern officers were sceptical of the ACLOs. Can you expand on these comments?

Mr SMITH: In response to the first part of the question: I certainly did consider calling out the ACLOs. The difficulty on the night was that the civil unrest at that point was almost at flashpoint, and the ACLOs, as unsworn officers, do not have any training in public order management or negotiation skills. I made the determination at that point that if I did bring any of them in I probably would have been placing them in a little more jeopardy than trained police, on the one hand because I think the Aboriginal people would have seen the ACLOs as working as an ally for the police on that night, and, with the obviously evident frustrations of what happened on the night, it was going to be difficult for an ACLO to try and stop. So that probably is expanding on the rationale of the decision.

In response to the second part: There was some scepticism with some police about the role of the ACLO. We have been working on that with our remaining ACLO to improve the relations. She has been going out with police on particular jobs more often. I am confident that that has improved relations—maybe not to 100 per cent, but it has improved and will continue to improve relations once we get the other three ACLOs.

CHAIR: What about the part of the question that refers to your belief that the community did not, or does not, think highly of the ACLOs?

Mr SMITH: That was some of the feedback I was getting when I was attending various community meetings: that it was felt that the ACLOs could be doing more than they were. I undertook, as the commander, to try to improve some of the outputs of that group. That group now is one lady, so my request to her about what she can do as one person as opposed to a group of four speaks for itself. But I do believe her work in the community has improved. I do not think we will ever convince all of the Aboriginal community about the work of the ACLOs; it is a very difficult and tenuous position. But I believe the majority feel there has been some improvement there.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: One of the ACLOs—I am not sure which one—stated that prior to the riot they had informed the police that there was likely to be a riot.

CHAIR: Arthur, again—

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That was the antecedent to a question. I am going to ask question 12.

CHAIR: In fairness to other members, I need to remind you about our terms of reference.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: There is no fairness issue involved.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I was not asking a question. I was simply stating a fact from evidence we have had. You cannot ask me not to restate evidence that we have had here! Fair go!

CHAIR: I think as Committee members we have an obligation to stick to the purposes of our inquiry. But please ask question 12.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The Committee is aware that two ACLOs stationed at the Redfern Local Area Command at the time of the riot were not asked to participate in Strike Force Coburn. Why were the ACLOs not invited to put forward their views and versions of events? And did you inform the ACLOs under your command that Strike Force Coburn was being conducted, and offer assistance to them to prepare their submissions? And why were they not given a copy of the report?

Mr SMITH: As to the first part: I was not a committee member of Coburn, so I am probably not able to answer specifically why the committee may not have invited that group to make a submission. I can say, though, in relation to the second part, that the ACLOs—which would have been Mr Wilson and Ms Townsend, who were working after the riot—were part of parades and briefings in the morning and in the evenings at Redfern. Part of that parade was devoted to the fact that down the track there was going to be an internal report. We did not know the name of that. When we did, we said the Coburn report would be coming out, and I invited everyone in the command to put forward a submission. I did not personally assist anyone any further than that, because I did not want that to be interpreted as interference, as opposed to being supportive of them putting in a submission. In addition to that, a statewide memorandum went out on the police computer system—and the ACLOs are part of the service—calling for anybody who wanted to make any submission, report or claims to do so to Coburn. So they were informed in a number of meetings to come forward and make some reports.

CHAIR: And the last bit, about getting a copy of the report?

Mr SMITH: Again, not being a committee member, I am not privy to how copies of the Coburn report were handed out, or where information about it was placed, or who received it.

CHAIR: For instance, did lots of copies arrive at Redfern? How was it disseminated in your command?

Mr SMITH: I now have two bound copies that we are working through, and I plan to request that it go onto the intranet site, which is a local site that we have, so that people can read those documents.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Three positions for ACLOs are going to be advertised. If you have four ACLOs on staff, will that give you adequate coverage for ACLOs across the command, on a seven-day-a-week basis?

Mr SMITH: Yes.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: How does that work?

Mr SMITH: We are doing pretty poorly with one, as you would imagine. But, with four, we will be able to roster at the peak times, which would be across the weekends, and Thursday night has been a bit of a problem for us. So we will have a specific roster for them, and four will be plenty.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Perhaps, as part of that, you might look at questions 10 and 11 and include answers to those in relation to the sort of training and what will happen once those ACLOs are appointed to their positions.

Mr SMITH: The State co-ordinator for the ACLO program, who is Doreen Peters, has come to Redfern. She has worked there for two weeks in recent times and has spoken to the only ACLO we have and myself, and we have developed an outline of how we can improve the performance of the ACLO programs, as opposed to perhaps anyone who is there at present. The sorts of things we will come with are that the ACLOs will work with the duty officer on shift—who is basically the senior inspector on shift—so they can be tasked with the duty officer to go to certain functions, and they will be coming to many of the forums in the community that I attend, which again are about that relationship and bond. Back on daily tasking, we will provide them a number of tasks to complete each day, and at the end of the day they will sit down with the duty officer and go through those taskings and tick them off. So we will be tightening up the tasking and deployment, there will be a little bit more project involvement, and there will certainly be some more community involvement across the command. That has come from the State ACLOs co-ordinator, who obviously deals with those matters.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Basically, they will report directly to the duty officer?

Mr SMITH: Yes, the duty officer, who is the most senior person on the shift.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: The Committee has had the opportunity to visit the Tranby Aboriginal College to learn about the course that is being conducted for the Redfern officers. Do you have any feedback from the officers about the course?

Mr SMITH: Yes. Could you direct me to that question?

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: It is question 6.

Mr SMITH: I know that the Committee has gone out to the Tranby college with Mr Paul Knight. We have developed a package, and the staff have been through the initial training phase. We have three more training dates—7 and 17 November and 17 December—so we will have another 40 or 50 staff go through Tranby before the end of the year, and the remaining staff will be picked up early in 2005. The feedback is generally good. The staff have asked though for a bit more localised content, in terms of some practical tips on how the police, in their daily duties when dealing with the Aboriginal community can further improve relations. So they have asked for some extra things to be included in the program and we are going to talk to Paul about those. He has given us the broad brush on Aboriginal culture, and we have asked for some localised content specific to Redfern that police might be able to use on night shift at say 2 o'clock on a particular weekday just to enhance relationships.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Would you intend that all officers go through the course?

Mr SMITH: All officers at Redfern will undertake both this course and the Barry Williams training course at the college.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Given that the officers have asked for something that has a bit more localised content, might that mean a change in the time that the course would run?

Mr SMITH: I do not think it will be major. I think Paul can accommodate that with his knowledge and by talking to a few of the local Aboriginal elders, and that we will be able to put that into the content without a massive change or a delay in timings. I am conscious of training as many as we can, as quickly as we can. It really was not a great problem, but just something in the feedback sheets from the first couple of courses, and I want to action those so that I can keep the police confident that they will get from the course some information that they can use.

CHAIR: I am not sure whether the decision not to send probationers to Redfern has already been implemented, and whether that means the ones you had have flowed through. But, in terms of Tranby and other training, I assume you are expecting less turnover, but even so it will remain quite

high. What sort of ongoing arrangements are you making for cultural awareness, and perhaps even cultural awareness refresher programs?

Mr SMITH: In relation to the first part, probationers have ceased coming to Redfern. I think we have missed one or two classes already there so we are already gaining in our seniority obviously from the fact that we are not getting probationers. So that has stopped. There is a twelve-month cap on that, subject to further review. In relation to the second part, certainly the movement in and out of Redfern has not been great anyway. But all of the additional police that have come in under secondment or transfer will undergo the training. So at any one point I probably will not have 100 per cent, but all of the people that come in will be trained.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I was interested in the interaction between the Tranby courses under Paul Knight and the Barry Williams courses at the police academy at Goulburn, and whether or not there had been any interaction between those two individuals to tailor the courses, and whether into the future the two courses would be developed so that they complement each other, and how those two people are involved in the audit of the Aboriginal strategic directions document 2003-06.

Mr SMITH: I will test my memory here. On the first part of the question: Certainly, there are some strong points there. After the feedback sheets are put in and compiled, there could be some adjustment of the programs to complement one or the other. I think there is some value in making sure that they work in harmony, and I think there is some value in those people getting together—which I think was the second point you made. They probably have not at this stage, although they may know each other through the Aboriginal network. That is something I will take on board, and I certainly undertake to get them together. You made a third point.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I was interested to know about the importance of the future of those two separate cultural awareness training programs being complementary and having a future, as opposed to one of them or half of one or both of them withering on the vine, and how they are able to interact in regard to the auditing and the advancement of that Aboriginal strategic directions package, and in particular satisfying on-the-ground police in Redfern in terms of their concerns about getting satisfaction as to solutions to policing problems in Redfern, and not just getting cultural awareness training and feeling that they have wasted their time.

Mr SMITH: I think you have raised valid points about getting Paul, myself, Doreen Peters and some Aboriginal people and Barry Williams from the academy together and sifting through that strategic document, because under the seven or eight objectives in the strategic plan for Aboriginal affairs we have scope locally to implement what we need to do to get the job done and meet those objectives. I certainly need to keep the police interested by having that local content. An appropriate course will keep them focussed on Aboriginal relations. So I am very happy to take that back and start that very soon.

The Hon. IAN WEST: We are obviously extremely interested in trying to ensure against a surge of enthusiasm and then a withering on the vine.

Mr SMITH: Point completely taken.

CHAIR: There are a number of dot points in question 7. I assume that, in preparing answers to these questions, you have checked some of those factual matters.

Mr SMITH: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you able to give us, for instance, how many workshops have been conducted at the police college for Redfern officers over the past five years, and so on?

Mr SMITH: Yes. Barry Williams actually comes up to Redfern. On average he had probably been doing two a year up until this year. He has done four this year, and he has others programmed for the remainder of this year. We will have a planning calendar for 2005 whereby, as I said, 100 per cent of staff will go through the Barry Williams one-day planning workshop and also through Tranby. About 35 to 40 per cent of staff currently have gone through Barry Williams's workshops. Mr West indicated that the issue of superseding both and having one or the other. That is a planning forum I

need to have on evaluation of both training packages to see where we go, perhaps with one package or keeping the two in isolation.

CHAIR: Does Mr Williams localise his courses when he comes to Redfern?

Mr SMITH: Not as much. Certainly, urban Aboriginal has a content, but it is not drilled down to Redfern in particular.

CHAIR: Have officers made the same sort of comments about his courses that they have about the Tranby course—wanting it to be more specifically local?

Mr SMITH: Not particularly. The last feedback sheets were from Tranby and there were themes about localised content and practical tips for officers to use on shift.

CHAIR: Have you thought about community members from Redfern-Waterloo participating in these programs?

Mr SMITH: Yes, some do participate, particularly in the induction program. They come along and talk to probationers. We take probationers around to different women's agencies and they have an opportunity to talk to the groups.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I refer back to the investigation of the allegations about ACLO Wilkinson. If he feels threatened, presumably by the police, there is either a personal vendetta or corruption behind that. Is it appropriate that the police investigate that—it could involve one of their colleagues? Should that not go to the Police Integrity Commission [PIC]?

Mr SMITH: I am probably not in a position to answer that. There has been an investigation, and I was not privy to the exact allegation and the decision about where that may be investigated. That decision is made by someone other than me.

CHAIR: This matter has been discussed not only by this committee but also by the Clerk of the Legislative Council, and a number of steps have been taken. Clearly, as a committee, we are not in a position to investigate allegations of this kind; this is way beyond our individual competence or the legislation setting up committees like this. Given the decisions that the committee has made and the other action that has been taken within the Legislative Council framework, plus what Superintendent Smith has said about police investigations, it is not an area that we can progress here. As you know, Dr Chesterfield-Evans, we have had committee discussions about these matters extending over some time.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The committee discussion was about whether the ACLOs would be recalled.

CHAIR: I also remind you that the committee deliberations are confidential to the committee until we produce our final report, at which point we may or may not make comments about some of these matters. The committee has discussed these very serious allegations and, as you know, has taken a lot of advice about how we and others should deal with them. You are going beyond where we should go in raising them now.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If there is a problem in Redfern surely it is the superintendent's bailiwick.

CHAIR: You have just asked him what he thinks about what other people should do.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: He is not a nobody.

CHAIR: Given what he has said previously about a police investigation and what you know quite well from committee decisions and the Clerk's examination of these matters this is not something that we are able to canvass here or something that this committee can come to grips with. We are a social issues committee of the Legislative Council; we are not the court, the Coroner, the police or investigators.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The general principle of separation of powers is clear and one in which parliamentarians should take an interest. It states that we do not have people investigating themselves. Surely that is a perfectly reasonable question.

CHAIR: I am sorry, but this is not something for discussion here. The committee's deliberations are private to the committee; they are confidential to the committee at this stage.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That is fair enough, and I take that point. I am asking whether the PIC should investigate these sorts of allegations rather than the police.

CHAIR: Whatever that could possibly have to do with our terms of reference I would be delighted to hear. However, I rule that these questions are outside the committee's terms of reference. Given the committee's deliberations, they are not appropriately raised in a public hearing with Superintendent Smith.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I refer to Strike Force Timepiece. The committee was told that there have been 35 or so arrests but 34 of the alleged offenders are on bail. Can you provide an update on that?

Mr SMITH: I cannot provide specific and accurate details.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Please take that question on notice and provide a written response.

Mr SMITH: Yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: The numbers are roughly correct. At that stage we did not know whether any of those prosecutions had proceeded and whether any penalties had been imposed.

Mr SMITH: There have been some prosecutions, but I cannot provide the detail.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I understand that Strike Force Timepiece concluded some months ago.

Mr SMITH: I think some people are still wanted. I will take the question on notice and clarify that.

CHAIR: Question 8 refers to a document entitled "Standard Operating Procedures", which deals with the management of Aboriginal incidents. We have advised that this is being developed by you and the LAC in conjunction with the Aboriginal co-ordination team. How is that going?

Mr SMITH: That particular document is with the professional standards command for review. When we bring in statewide operating procedures there must be a sign off at that level. Once that happens, we will be looking to implement some of the strategies. I cannot go into detail until we get that sign off. In broad terms, it deals with ways to improve relationships and action to be taken if a civil unrest situation arose.

CHAIR: When it is signed off will it come back to Redfern as a pilot or will it apply to the entire State? How will it be implemented?

Mr SMITH: I do not have the jurisdiction to answer that.

CHAIR: Perhaps you can take that question on notice, or the committee can take it up with the professional standards unit.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I refer to the Aboriginal strategic directions document. The committee's interim report recommended an audit of the implementation of the relevant initiatives contained in the directions document in the Redfern LAC. Has that started and, if so, who is undertaking it?

Mr SMITH: The six-month review of the 32 initiatives for Redfern in the enhanced policing package will pick up this audit. I understand it has started. The enhanced policing packages were announced on 16 or 17 July, so the six-month review process will pick up the review on the Aboriginal strategic directions of 2003-06. I imagine the people doing that review will undertake the Redfern review of the project. I am not sure who that is.

The Hon. IAN WEST: What role will you have?

Mr SMITH: No doubt the review panel will ask what we have done in relation to the Aboriginal strategic directions. Some questions have been asked, but I have not been formally asked to provide all the data yet. The six-month review is not due. I am confident we will have achieved many of the objectives.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Who is doing it?

Mr SMITH: It is going to be done as part of the six-month review, but I am not sure who will do it. I imagine it will be through the police executive.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Has the local area command Aboriginal consultative committee been established? When was it established and how many times has it met? Who is on the committee and can you describe the work that it has been doing? Have the senior and youth advisory committees been established?

Mr SMITH: The LACAC will probably be the senior advisory committee; it will be one and the same. We have had a little difficulty recruiting eight elders from the community for the senior team. We had a meeting date planned with some indication that eight would come, but only four intended to participate. We have now tried to recruit an additional four people so that I can start that committee. I have not started the senior advisory team. I will have it operational by the end of December this year. I have made approaches to other people in the community who have indicated that they will form part of the group. I have outlined the charter and they have indicated that they will come on board.

The youth advisory committee has started. It has met and we are using the PCYC as the venue. Aboriginal elders come along and work with the young people. The first meeting was very productive. They want police to understand more about Aboriginal culture, which we are doing. They also want to work through perceived harassment. We are talking about the police role and what that means to the young people. I am happy that those issues have been raised. We can get to the crux of the issues. They will meet bi-monthly through 2005. The committee involves a cross section of young people—some go to school, some are street kids and some are employed.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I presume there may be some potential, co-ordinated by you, for the elders to assist in dealing with the difficulties in the Tranby and the Goulburn cultural awareness programs. It appears that the police are having difficulty with local solutions. They want local solutions to policing, but they do not feel that this is fulfilling that need. To make the cultural awareness programs relevant to the local police at Redfern, I presume some assistance will be provided by this group of elders.

Mr SMITH: Yes.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Are you looking at ways in which that interaction might take place?

Mr SMITH: Certainly. Once we get the senior team in place I anticipate that they will work with us. I think we should provide them with the minutes from the young people's advisory committee to see whether they have any suggestions.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Is that the youth task force?

Mr SMITH: No. When I arrived I was trying to establish a senior team and a youth advisory council. That is managed by the youth officers under the mentor program. It is separate from the youth task force, which is managed by the Redfern-Waterloo partnership project. That project is its domain.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: How are the young people selected to be part of that advisory committee?

Mr SMITH: We went to some of the schools and we asked the teachers who might be appropriate. We did not want the A-grade students; we wanted young people who had different views and who would be outspoken enough to talk about the issues of the day. We have the street kids we come into contact with. The South Sydney Youth Centre and other groups are also involved. Some of those children will be involved in ongoing youth programs.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: You are confident that you have a good cross-section from the community of young people?

Mr SMITH: I think the first one we have. There is probably always a review after that first group of some others that should come in. I am just conscious to try to keep it at a manageable number. But I will talk to the youth officers and if they believe some other children should come in then they will.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Is there a way for young people to feed their issues into that program? I know there are different youth services operating in that area.

Mr SMITH: Yes, that is what I have asked the youth officers to do: to go back to the various youth interagency groups and talk generally about the young people, have discussions and see if some of the local youth agencies can also give us some solutions, as well as some of the problems sometimes. They might give us some ideas about how we can move forward with the young people.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: The committee has heard varying comments, mostly glowing, about the youth mentoring program that you have been operating. How long has it been going? How many young people and police officers have participated in it? What is the feedback?

Mr SMITH: I have been there two years and it has certainly been running as we would know it now as the mentoring program with some objectives for at least two years, and there were some haphazard camps prior to that. I have tried to identify some of the young people who were coming under notice—it may have been for minor offences but we could pick a pattern of behaviour that may lead to more serious offences later. First of all, we put two full-time youth officers into action at Redfern. We increased the number of police doing specialist youth training as well. We have about 12 police who participate part-time in the camps, and some of the larger activities where we need to supervise a larger group of young people.

The ages range from about 9-years up to 16 or 17-years-old, mainly Aboriginal people from Redfern and Waterloo. Some of the people referred to us are from the PCYC at Waterloo and others we select ourselves, or the parents come to us and say "Listen, we would like our young person to be involved in some of the activities." I suppose the objectives are to try to keep the kids in school who go to school. And there will be mischievous behaviour—they are young people like any other young people—and if we can keep it at that level I will be very happy. It is about the escalating opportunity to commit crime that we try to stop. I think it is a greater interaction that they have with police. It is another opportunity for us to talk about the role of policing and the side of police that they may not necessarily see.

It has been quite interesting to me, with all of the reported issues and dramas that we have with the community, that the parents still let the kids come away with the police every weekend, even from February on. We have had a range of organised activities. We took 25 young people to Gosford last week to a super-cross championship. There is an Aboriginal fellow named Chad Read who is doing very well in America. We brought him here. He was on his honeymoon, so we did not miss the opportunity and he talked to the kids about how he grew up in Newcastle with nothing, and how he has made his way. That is just a recent example. We have got a calendar for 2004 Christmas holidays and 2005.

In terms of evaluation, it is listed there. Earlier I touched on some quantitative data which is the fact that we have charged less young people in this quarter than we have in the previous quarter, which is positive. Probably the unmeasurable is that interface that cops are having with young people in Redfern, and it is not always on an antagonistic basis or a perceived harassment basis. We are actually trying to break down some of the barriers and talk to them and take them away. When you take the young people away from the Redfern environment, it is very interesting how they change.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Do you say that the ongoing relationship is difficult to evaluate, but you are confident that it is sustainable, once they come from a weekend or a camp, and that there is still a positive relationship?

Mr SMITH: Yes, it is what we have done with the youth officers. I think we can measure over time. I will be very interested to see how this group of young people are in Redfern, if they stay there, in young adulthood and beyond. The part of development we have done is in the schools. We have got some special schools set up now in Redfern, a Waratah program. We have got the Alexandra Park. One of the youth officers goes to the schools very regularly now, so we are having ongoing contact with the young people at the schools, the young people that go to the PCYC and the street kids. It is not like a one-off weekend and we do not talk to them anymore. It is an ongoing contact that might be weekly or daily on some occasions where we think there is a need. If it goes beyond the bounds of police resources then we are working closely with other health services and DOCS and we will certainly talk to them about trying to bring in some additional support for the kids.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: The committee has received lots of evidence, since May when you appeared, about the varying abilities of the DOCS which has come from police officers and other witnesses about the relationship between DOCS and the police. Will you comment on the suggestions of a lack of co-ordination between the police and DOCS?

Mr SMITH: Certainly from the perspective of the management team or the command, I have weekly contact with the acting director of DOCS. If we have any issues they are resolved. Part of the question, certainly the understanding from the police, I will take on board and talk to them at the training days about it. I think they feel they can put a notification in on a young person and obviously something happens quite quickly. Once you look at the workload and some of the issues that DOCS has to manage, and the priorities of young people they have to deal with, the reality is that sometimes things take time to get done, and there are others in greater need. I think that is something I can communicate back to the staff, after sitting through plenty of meetings of DOCS and getting an understanding of some of the difficulties and frustrations that they do have. Generally, we put in our notifications, we meet with DOCS and I, as the commander, do not have any complaints at all.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It was said that DOCS is mainly interested in child protection and does not do much preventative programs amongst family support. Do the police have to fill the gap with the lack of prevention that should be done by DOCS?

Mr SMITH: I suppose in terms of my charter there I see it certainly as a role for police to do what we are doing with the camps and so forth. We involve the street team which, as I see it, is a preventative arm of DOCS that are working in Redfern and Waterloo with the kids. We have regular contact with that group, so I see that as a preventative measure. Also the fact that I mentioned on a previous occasion that we were trying to pilot the intensive family case management. My understanding is that they may be close to sign-off, that particular case management project. That is about all agencies getting together and being able to share information on families legally, and then working on that family to improve whatever requirements, benefits, welfare or health need to be improved on that particular group of families, and prioritise them. I see that as a big step forward.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I understand DOCS are, to some extent, leaving the prevention to other youth agencies, of which there are number including the biggest, Barnardo's. Do you liaise with each of them to try to smooth things over or do you just run a show with your own mentoring program and activities?

Mr SMITH: I probably could not comment on the first part of DOCS shelving responsibility, but certainly with those other agencies that are having a role in terms of Barnardo's and

the street team and some of the groups that are funded to do activities, yes, the police, youth officers, crime prevention officers or myself have regular contact with all of them.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is that done on an individual-person level or at a general institution-to-institution level?

Mr SMITH: No, it is probably more personalised than that. We have smaller meetings, myself and Barnardo's. The street team talk to the youth officers regularly on the street about young people and who to support and who maybe a little bit vulnerable so I think it gets broken down.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Through a case management conference level?

Mr SMITH: Yes, probably informally at this stage. I think the sign-off that we may be able to get with the intensive family management will be a formalised process between government and non-government agencies. That will be about problem solving, the family, which is something that I am looking forward to doing.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is the Privacy Commissioner happy with that?

Mr SMITH: I could not comment with any authority as to where that sign-off is.

CHAIR: Question 18 is about the substantial difficulties in the relationship between police and young people. Recently young people have reiterated to the committee the old problem that if they are Koori kids they are much more likely to be stopped in the street, asked where they are going and where they have been, and asked for identification. I guess at times police do display inappropriate behaviour to young people in general perhaps, and Koori young people in particular. What is your comment? What is the training for officers in Redfern in relation to young people?

Mr SMITH: With 150-200 officers, if something like that happens, and it is brought to our attention, it will be stopped very quickly. We are quite clear in our stand on any type of racism. I have no evidence that it does happen. I have only had one complaint of racism in the past year in terms of people coming forward from any forum and complaining to me, and it could be through the Aboriginal Legal Service, the medical service, the courts or the Ombudsman and that person was a non-Aboriginal. In terms of data collection, there is no evidence in front of me to suggest that it is problem. Anecdotally from what you have told me, if there is, then I will reinforce it. I am confident the cultural awareness training, the interaction with the mentor program, the greater interaction with the PCYC and the kids in general should provide police with a greater understanding of what the issues that these young people face are, and have greater appreciation of that fact.

CHAIR: We asked you about the strategies outlined in the Redfern-Waterloo community safety plan, one of which is the establishment of a training program between police and local and youth workers. Has that program been developed?

Mr SMITH: Yes, it is probably more an informal program. I have spoken to John Maynard who is the community safety task force author. He works for the Sydney City Council. Our youth officers have met with John, and other youth services. They have ongoing meetings and discussions about ways to improve youth relations. There is probably not a plan, as such, or a document that they can put their hands on, but they are meeting regularly. We are starting to implement some of the community safety plan recommendations, and that is certainly one of them.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Have the OSG equipment, the shields, the riot gear at Redfern LAC been replaced?

Mr SMITH: Yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: You do not have any more shields that are too short to protect officers, and the other equipment defects that were mentioned in Strike Force Coburn, they have all been replaced?

Mr SMITH: Yes, it has. The shields themselves though are still the appropriate shield. I am not too sure about the length, but they are the standard shield.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: You mentioned the football carnival. The committee heard a couple of people complain that they thought there was an over police presence at that carnival. They made comments that there were carloads of police around the corner and so on. Whenever I go to the football I expect to see police around. Was there a major operation involved? What level of policing did you undertake for that exercise?

Mr SMITH: I worked most double shifts across that weekend myself, and part of the reason for that is that I wanted to have a low-key policing approach. What we did through the planning sessions, I indicated we would have enough police to deal with any issues that developed, however, the front-line policing would be low key. It would be no more or less than we would usually have in Redfern. Of course, with 5,000 extra people, regardless of background, we were going to have some additional resources, and we did have additional resources, but it was a low-key approach. The points of issues are: first, there was no problem. There was no major incident outside or inside the ground through those four days. Second, there was no escalation in crime that I can pick in any of the trends in and around Redfern for those four days. I am claiming it as a success.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I thought it was too. In relation to the spate of very bad robberies, particularly handbags of elderly ladies taken and so on, what have you done specifically to address that appalling crime?

Mr SMITH: Of the additional police who have been seconded, the detectives, most are working in the robbery unit. We now have the ability to isolate offenders and locations and improve the layout of some of the locations, where those offences were happening, with additional lighting, cutting down trees, and so forth. We have arrested a number of people who we believe were responsible for a few incidents; and the last two months were probably the lowest two months of robbery offences in Redfern for some significant time.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: The Committee heard some evidence about assaults on police officers, including rocks being thrown at cars. The Committee has some data on how common that was. Has that maintained at the same level or reduced over the past few months?

Mr SMITH: It would seem to have reduced as well; injuries to police and the reporting of rock throwing have essentially decreased in recent months.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: To what do you attribute that reduction?

Mr SMITH: Again, I can give you my opinion of what we are trying to do. We have significantly cleared out a lot of the people who were not living on the Block at Redfern who perhaps were using the Block as a haven to distribute drugs. By removing the majority of those 35 people—minute, most of who never lived on the Block—out of the area, that has left a majority of decent families residing there and going about their business. I suggest that a lot of the troublemakers at the moment are not in Redfern.

CHAIR: You have undertaken to forward other information to the Committee.

Mr SMITH: Yes, I have.

CHAIR: The information that is required will be identified by Rachel Callinan from the transcript. Could you supply that information within two weeks?

Mr SMITH: Yes, I can. I look forward to the final report.

(The witness withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

NEIL CRAIG SHEPHERD, Director-General, Department of Community Services, 4-6 Cavill Avenue, Ashfield, and

ANNE-MAREE SABELLICO, Regional Director Metro Central, Department of Community Services, 55 Renwick Street, Redfern, on former affirmation:

TRINA WHITTON, Manager Client Service, Eastern Sydney Community Service Centre, Department of Community Services, 55 Renwick Street, Redfern, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: The Committee has forwarded questions to you, which you have had time to look at. Dr Shepherd, do you want to make an opening statement before the Committee asks questions under a series of headings?

Dr SHEPHERD: No, that is not necessary. Any opening statement wished to make we made at the last Committee hearing.

CHAIR: Dr Shepherd, the Committee has a number of questions on staffing, quite a few come of which refer to the evidence you gave when you appear before the Committee in June. We are asking for an update, or factual answers to certain matters. Previously you said that the Eastern Sydney Community Service Centre [CSC] will get 11 new caseworkers as part of the general increase in staffing. What are the current staffing ratios in the Eastern Sydney CSC? Have the new caseworkers been employed?

Dr SHEPHERD: The current staffing in Eastern Sydney Community Service Centre is the same as when we appeared before you last time. Eastern Sydney CSC currently has 51.9 full-time equivalent staff. Of those, 34.3 full-time equivalent staff are caseworkers. Over the next two years, as we indicated to you, that is 2004-05 the current year, and 2005-06, there will be 11 new staff, both caseworkers and casework managers recruited for the Eastern Sydney Community Service Centre. At the moment we are in the process of recruiting across the State. We are in the process of the second major recruitment for this calendar year. We have some 1,500 applications for caseworker positions and we expect to be able to fill all of the positions that we currently will fill in 2004-05. We hope to put four caseworkers into Eastern Sydney CSC in this calendar year, and the other seven positions will be filled in 2005-06.

CHAIR: When you say "this coming year" you mean before 31 December rather than before the end of the financial year?

Dr SHEPHERD: The intention would be this calendar year if we can do it. We are in the process of finalising the selection process and so on. We probably will make offers before the end of this calendar year, in which case notionally those people would be allocated against the CSCs to which they would be going. But they then need to undergo the caseworkers development course before they can do the full range of duties that we expect of caseworkers. So they are partially on duty from the beginning then after three or four months they can come on to doing full work.

CHAIR: You also mentioned when you came before us before that you are recruiting and training a substantial number of Aboriginal staff. Can you give us figures for DOCS as a whole and how many are located at Eastern Sydney?

Dr SHEPHERD: Yes, we can break that down. DOCS currently employs about 200 Aboriginal staff, which is 7 per cent of our total establishment. That is substantially above the New South Wales Government target of 2 per cent. That is not surprising given the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. Clearly, we want more Aboriginal staff. We are not satisfied with 7 per cent: we need to get well beyond that. The 200 encompasses both identified positions—identified specifically for Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islanders—and non-identified positions. Predominantly they are caseworkers, although there are now quite a few case managers and also a few managers client services plus a wide range of clerical support staff and also now one member of the executive at Senior Executive Service level.

The new head of the Communities Division in the department is Aboriginal, although that is a mainstream position. The current round of caseworker recruitment has given us over 100 Aboriginal applications, which is a very pleasant surprise. I think that is partly as a result of DOCS having a slightly better profile than it has had previously, but also because of some really targeted recruitment in the Aboriginal press and also in Aboriginal communities. We have been putting a substantial effort into getting people to apply. We are in the final process of selecting six cadets—two in psychology, two in law and two in social work—whom we will take through the university courses and then bring them into the organisation under cadetship programs. If that works well, and we anticipate that it will work well, we would expect to increase the number of cadetship in subsequent years.

CHAIR: Are they at school leaver level or part of the way through—

Dr SHEPHERD: Some of them are part way through and some will be entering university. We got 17 applications for the six positions so it appears that we will not have any difficulty in filling those six. There are 10 caseworker positions in Metro Central and of those there are four in Eastern Sydney. They are currently under recruitment: the positions are currently vacant. There is one in Sutherland, which is filled. There is one in St George, which is filled. There is one in Newtown, which is filled. There are three in Strathfield and Lakemba, two filled and one vacant.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Were the 10 in Metro Central all vacant or only the four in—

Dr SHEPHERD: No, only the four in Eastern Sydney are vacant. They are under active recruitment at the moment and we anticipate that they will be filled in the future.

CHAIR: Are they new positions?

Dr SHEPHERD: No, they are old positions.

CHAIR: Presumably, it is sometimes difficult to find qualified people to fill them.

Dr SHEPHERD: Yes. Historically there have been a substantial number of Aboriginal-identified positions in DOCS that have remained vacant despite the efforts to fill them. I guess part of that is DOCS' history with Aboriginal people—or its predecessors more than DOCS. Part of that is that it is difficult to get people who have sufficient qualification to take up the work. There are two caseworkers in the Redfern-Waterloo street team, which operates out of Metro Central. They are both filled. There are two caseworkers at Yallamundi Intensive Family Based Service, and they are both filled. There is one caseworker in the regional out-of-home care team. That is filled. There are two managers casework. One at Eastern Sydney is vacant and one at Yallamundi is filled. Then there are three Aboriginal administrative and clerical positions, of which two are filled and one is vacant. So the majority of positions are filled but there are some vacancies. There is a predominance of vacancies at Eastern Sydney versus some of the other locations. We anticipate that would be rectified within the next two months.

CHAIR: We have heard evidence that the salaries and perhaps more difficult working conditions in the Eastern Sydney area mean that it is harder to fill all positions than in some other parts of Sydney or other parts of the State, and that the turnover is higher. Does that apply to the Aboriginal positions you are talking about?

Dr SHEPHERD: I would need to come back to you on that. Two years ago when I first came to DOCS the turnover rate was around 14 per cent or a little over. It is now below the public sector across-the-board average at about 7.3 per cent. If you wanted specific details on Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal I may be able to get those figures or they may be difficult; I am just not sure.

CHAIR: If you take it on notice that would be good. Given the vacancies you have mentioned and the evidence we have just had from Superintendent Smith about continuing vacant ACLO positions, it would be of use to us to know to what extent it is a problem with filling the positions rather than the intentions of the agency concerned.

Dr SHEPHERD: On the subject of filling the positions, we have got 100 applications in this last round of bulk recruitment and the preliminary assessment—I stress preliminary—is that there are a substantial number of well-qualified applicants, which has been another problem for us in the past.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Have the four vacant positions at Eastern Sydney ever been filled?

Ms SABELLICO: Yes, they have been. Currently they are vacant and we have undertaken an extensive recruitment campaign in looking at participating in the bulk recruitment exercise, and one of our managers casework is leading that recruitment panel. We have also undertaken to work with local employment agencies in trying to identify people who would be keen and appropriate to work in that department. We have provided them with opportunities such as site visits to Eastern Sydney to see the type of work that occurs, as well as offering shadowing of caseworkers so they may understand the work a little better. From that, about 15 people have since expressed an interest in applying or have continued to have discussions with us about the work.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It seems strange that all four positions are vacant at the one time. Have all positions been vacant for a while?

Ms SABELLICO: At this point in time they are all vacant, given that we have had some difficulties in recruiting. They did not all become vacant at the same time. It seems that this is just the cumulative effect while we are undertaking the recruitment, trying to identify better ways in which to seek people who would be interested in working for the agency.

CHAIR: Did any of those people go to the street team or to Yallamundi? Did the Aboriginal people currently working in those positions come from outside the area?

Ms SABELLICO: With the street team, we have done a recruitment campaign with some of the other agencies to seek potential applicants, and from there we have been able to fill a couple of positions from the local community, as well as support the employer agencies within the street team to also access positions. So it has been successful for those teams.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: A number of witnesses have told us that there are two issues with staff recruitment in the Redfern-Waterloo area. The first is the difficulty of attracting qualified caseworkers who have life experience, and the second is the difficulty of creating an incentive for them to go to the Redfern-Waterloo area as opposed to any other area. Would you like to respond to those comments?

Dr SHEPHERD: With regard to the Redfern-Waterloo area itself, my understanding is that Eastern Sydney CSC is no more difficult to fill positions generically than many of the other CSCs. There are many more substantial difficulties in filling some of the non-Aboriginal positions in metropolitan west and metropolitan southwest, and there are much greater difficulties in filling some of the rural positions than there are in filling positions in Eastern Sydney CSC. It must be remembered that Eastern Sydney CSC covers a much bigger area than Redfern-Waterloo; Redfern-Waterloo is only a small part of the Eastern Sydney CSC area of operation.

The other thing to remember is that historically there have been a substantial number of Aboriginal identified casework positions vacant within the agency—not because we did not want to fill them but because it was difficult to attract applicants. That is a legacy of history. I think we are now getting beyond that—and we need to see the result of the selection committee process—but with 100 applicants we would expect to be able to fill a substantial number of the vacant Aboriginal caseworker positions. I am on the record as saying that any qualified Aboriginal caseworkers I can get, I will take, in order to get us up to where we need to be.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: How do you define "qualified"? Your definition of "qualified" might be an academic qualification, whereas a number of community workers have expressed to us that it is life experience qualification that is lacking with DOCS workers, specifically in the Redfern-Waterloo area.

Dr SHEPHERD: In terms of Aboriginal identified positions, the academic qualification requirements do not apply on intake. We can take in suitable community members who express an interest in doing the work and are willing to undertake the required studies over time, and that is what we do. So there are a large number of Aboriginal caseworkers within DOCS who are in fact going through their study program whilst they are working in Aboriginal caseworker positions. So we are trying to get people who have the appropriate level of experience other than academic experience.

As with any organisation that is going to double the size of its field force—which is what will happen in DOCS over the five-year period of the Government's enhancement package—inevitably you are going to drop the average experience of your caseworkers, for the simple reason that you are going to be bringing in fewer experienced caseworkers and training them up.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: But you do not have any of the new ones yet.

Dr SHEPHERD: We have some, but not in Eastern Sydney CSC. I thought we gave you the average figures for experience on the last occasion.

CHAIR: Yes, in the Government's submission and what you gave us on notice on the last occasion.

Dr SHEPHERD: I think also in evidence on the last occasion I mentioned that different parts of the State have very different profiles in terms of experience of caseworkers. If you go to the Hunter, you are probably looking at an average—I can get you the exact figures—of five or six years experience in a caseworker, and vastly more than that in terms of the casework managers. In Eastern Sydney CSC, the situation, as I recall it, was that the average number of years of experience of the caseworkers was low, which is normal for the inner Sydney CSCs, and the experience of the managers casework was high. They had been around for, on average, seven years, and just under two years is the average for the new caseworkers. That is the pattern in metropolitan Sydney.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: The criticism is therefore appropriate, because they are not experienced enough to be handling the complex issues that they have to deal with in Redfern and Waterloo. That is right, is it not?

Dr SHEPHERD: No. The caseworkers are supervised closely by managers casework, so the difficult decisions and the complex cases are closely supervised by managers casework. The manager-to-caseworker ratio is about 1:6, so there is an opportunity for managers casework to supervise the difficult and complex cases. Those managers casework have, on average, seven years experience. As I said, you have to build a casework force in DOCS using the people who are appropriately qualified and available. I cannot wave a magic wand and suddenly make them all 10-year-out caseworkers; that is not what is available to me.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Have you addressed any ideas for incentives to attract more experienced workers to the area?

Dr SHEPHERD: We are certainly looking at a range of strategies to improve incentives. But our main problem in terms of attracting experienced and long-term staff will be in three areas. One will be in the western part of New South Wales. Once you get outside Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong, you need incentives to get people to go to the western areas and stay there for a period of time. We are working on an incentive package in order to do that, and that is for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff. We also need to attract experienced caseworkers to deal with the early intervention work that we are doing, so we are trying to attract from within the organisation some experienced caseworkers to do that. And for one of the complex and difficult areas that we deal with, which is the high-needs children, we need experienced caseworkers to tackle that area.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: During this inquiry the Committee has heard much criticism about DOCS performance in Redfern and Waterloo and about the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Program. That criticism has been from across the board: from police, non-government organisations, and community members. From the evidence it is clear that they are not satisfied that DOCS is adequately addressing the issues regarding early intervention, that you are not dealing adequately with level two and three cases, that you are only dealing with child protection issues. Nothing you have

said today gives me any confidence that you are adequately addressing those issues. Can you provide some sort of justification that that criticism is not valid?

Dr SHEPHERD: I do not know that it is justification, but the facts are on the public record and have been for some time now. They were given to the social issues committee in 2002. The Government released a whole lot of other information at the very end of 2002. You need to look at this in context. It is no good continuing to beat up DOCS about it, because DOCS is in a process of building to a point where it will have the capacity to do the sorts of things you are describing. But perhaps if I could go through it for you.

There was an overall increase in demand, as measured by child protection reports, of 432 per cent between 1996-97 and 2001-02. Those figures were released publicly in December 2002 in the Kibble report. What the Kibble report said categorically was that DOCS got to most of the level one cases that it received, it got to 25 per cent of the level two cases, and it got to 13 per cent of the level three cases. When I say "got to", I mean "allocated" to caseworkers. It actually does a lot more work with those cases at the front end to determine whether their priority should change. But they were the numbers.

Given that there has been a continued, steady increase in demand, you would not expect any significant change in the capacity of community service centres to get to a higher proportion of cases unless they had received their allocation of new staff under the Government's five-year program. It must be remembered that it was a five-year program, with 875 new caseworkers, 140 managers casework, 20 or so managers client services, and so on. The agreed way that this would roll out was community service centre by community service centre, so you build one—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Agreed by whom?

Dr SHEPHERD: Agreed between the Government and the agency, and it has been publicly out there for the whole time—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Agreed between the Government and DOCS?

Dr SHEPHERD: This is the way you have to roll it out—

CHAIR: I think we should say that this Committee did a wide-ranging inquiry into DOCS, and a lot of what Dr Shepherd is currently telling us was either told to our Committee or was part of our Committee's report.

Dr SHEPHERD: You do it CSC by CSC, for a number of very sound management reasons. You cannot do it uniformly across the board. It is just not possible physically in terms of accommodation, management, and so on, to simply increase this incrementally in each CSC across the board. The strategy around these cases you are talking about—the level ones, level twos and level threes—is that we will have an extra 375 child protection caseworkers to deal with the high-priority cases, and they are the level ones and level twos. By the time we have finished rolling out these, we would expect to get—we get to all the level ones now, but we would expect to get to all of the level twos as well.

We have a new group of caseworkers, identified in the funding package, which are the early intervention caseworkers, who are designed exclusively to deal with the level three cases. There are 350 of them to be rolled out statewide. Their sole focus is on the level three cases, where there is an opportunity to do some good work to stop them coming through the system in an escalating fashion over time. Currently Eastern Sydney gets to all of its level ones, it gets to around 20, 25 per cent of its level twos, but all of the level twos have work done on them by their intake team to ensure that there are no matters in there that should be escalated to a level one and be dealt with. The other thing about the level three cases is that it is not just caseworkers. There is substantial funding in the Government's reform package for building the service system that the caseworkers will rely on. There is \$150 million to be rolled out over the next five years in support of the early intervention and vulnerable families projects.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: We have had evidence from NGOs ad nauseam that said that in terms of early intervention, DOCS do not have liaison with NGOs, do not refer to a number of NGOs that are involved in early intervention and who are funded by DOCS and that DOCS, as opposed to other government departments, do not participate in the interagency meetings. I wonder if someone who is involved locally with the Redfern-Waterloo area could give us some information about that?

Dr SHEPHERD: We can certainly talk to you about the interagency meetings. I am quite happy for Ms Sabellico to talk about that, if you want to start with that one.

CHAIR: That is question five, basically.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I think it was meetings with NGOs as well, was it not?

Dr SHEPHERD: Yes. We will come back to that.

Ms SABELLICO: In response to the question asked, which was around the involvement of representatives from Eastern Sydney CSC attending interagencies, other forums and meetings, I think it is important to note at this point that your Eastern Sydney CSC, the caseworkers themselves are undertaking work related to the reports that they receive, both level ones and level twos that they get to. Significantly they are doing the critical work that is required around the reports received and doing the core business, which we need to look at in terms of the protection of children and young people. However, there is a range of other people that also are cited in Eastern Sydney that participate in the interagencies, forums and meetings that are held in Redfern-Waterloo. The manager, client services, as well as the child protection casework specialist would attend significant child protection interagency meetings that are held in Redfern, Waterloo or Metro Central but cover Redfern and Waterloo.

As well as them we have our partnerships and planning units. Their staff, the community program officers, directors of partnership and planning are quite involved as well a number of interagencies and meetings within the area. Again, it is also important to note that Eastern Sydney CSC covers more than just Redfern-Waterloo. The region of Metro Central goes from the Hawkesbury to Waterfall and out to Ashfield, so it covers quite a large area. We need to look at the significant meetings we should attend, and where we cannot we make sure that we get the minutes and look at the situation. When we need to attend, we do. If there are invitations to attend for joint specific discussions, that will occur. I, as regional director, am quite involved in the interagencies in Redfern-Waterloo, particularly at the senior officer level, and I am a member of a number of the task forces and the human services officers group for Redfern-Waterloo.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: In terms of the NGOs that go along to interagency meetings that have spoken with us, they are incorrect in saying that DOCS are not represented at those interagency meetings?

Ms SABELLICO: They might not be represented on that day at that meeting. As I said, we need to—

CHAIR: To be specific, for instance, people from the South Sydney Interagency have said that DOCS is conspicuously not present at their meetings.

Ms SABELLICO: The interagency, just the—

CHAIR: The group known as South Sydney Interagency.

Ms SABELLICO: Do not know. In terms of the group I specifically know that there is a youth task force interagency, youth interagency, that is established and which we have attended.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: You do not know that the group exists.

CHAIR: Can you take that on notice?

Ms SABELLICO: If I can just clarify, there are about 87 different meetings of interagencies or forums that exist in the Eastern Sydney CSC geography.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: We are talking about Redfern and Waterloo.

CHAIR: Perhaps I could suggest that you take that on notice. The group known as South Sydney, which is one that comes to mind, specifically made this comment.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: And the Koori Interagency said the same thing.

CHAIR: The Koori Interagency may be in a slightly different situation in terms of whether Aboriginal people should be identified. But it would be useful for us to get an answer for both.

Dr SHEPHERD: If you have some of the examples we can have a look at them specifically and come back to you.

CHAIR: South Sydney Interagency and Koori Interagency are certainly two groups that we have spoken to and the comment has been made. Perhaps that is something you can take on notice and get back to us.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: The numerous comments of the NGOs in Redfern and Waterloo have been that DOCS operate at a level that does not involve referral to them or, if they refer to DOCS, there is no follow up or support other than the short-term placement and, therefore, there is a lack of action and early intervention support. Do you want to say anything about that?

Ms WHITTON: I am not sure what you mean by short-term placement and then no follow up. If the report is made and we are unable to follow up as in a level three, there may be no follow up, there may be a referral because we simply are not resourced to get to that report. Certainly the reports that we respond to and families we are working with, we actively refer them to any services that we think might be able to support and assists them.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But do you follow up that referral with more information and ongoing, or do you simply say here it is?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Case closed.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Case closed?

Ms WHITTON: If we identify that there is a need for an ongoing role for the department and we are actively involved with the family, we continue to liaise with any services involved.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: The criticism has been that there may be intervention at a certain level, for example you might organise a placement to child care centre for a child for a period of time, but once that period of time is over then DOCS pulls out of that situation and it reverts back to the same level of support initially. It is not a long-term involvement.

Ms SABELLICO: In terms of the interventions or the referrals that are made to child care centres or other support services and the follow up being done around the assessment of that intervention, if, at that point in time, the case planner felt that there is a level of safety or other supports are in place in terms of being able to support that family, the child or young person, we might not necessarily continue to be involved, knowing that there are supportive structures and services in place that would then refer back if required. It would be dependent upon the level of success or otherwise of the intervention at the time of the assessment.

CHAIR: Could we finish the specifically Aboriginal-related questions? We have gone off on to a different area, but we have a number of questions, such as the back up or support for Aboriginal staff and training. We want to hear about your newish Aboriginal Services Branch. We have had specific criticisms reported to us about the failure to place Aboriginal children with Aboriginal foster families. I am looking at questions 3, 4, 6 and 7. We are anxious to not let them go before we get to the end. Let us get those on the record since we have sent them to you, and sort that information.

Dr SHEPHERD: There was a question provided, which was, "Could you outline the support you provided to Aboriginal staff in DOCS?" Maybe if I could answer that broadly, because some of the other questions go to some of the specifics. The first thing we do is we have established centralised unit to progress major policy and operational issues, which is known as the Aboriginal Services Branch. It has 15 staff in it and it has a range of functions around setting a progress, if you like, for recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff, developing an appropriate mentoring program and improving Aboriginal foster care strategies. They were also heavily involved in the development of the proposal for the Aboriginal Trust Fund. They do a range of things that are specific to that department's function with Aboriginal people. I will deal with that in more detail.

CHAIR: When was that established?

Dr SHEPHERD: It was established about a year and half ago, I guess. When I say "established", that is when we started on it. I think there was one person, or maybe two people, in it when I arrived. Now I think 13 of the 15 positions are filled with Aboriginal people. The unit is now functional. It has done a number of things in this past 12 months. It has launched the new Aboriginal cadetship proposal in DOCS, it has developed the Cultural Awareness Training Program within DOCS and, as I said, it has done some work on the Aboriginal Trust Fund. It is heavily involved in the roll out of the intensive family-based services, the Aboriginal family-based services in DOCS and it is doing some work at the moment on the Aboriginal communication protocol within DOCS. It has three main themes, if you like.

One is around developing policy or the interface between Aboriginal issues and policy within DOCS. It has an operational arm as well, which interfaces with the regions around specific issues and around a range of things in child protection, out-of-home care and so on, and it also has an employment and Aboriginal development unit, which is the unit that was, in part, responsible for the recruitment strategy that we have just followed. We also have at the moment the person who is actually managing the roll out of the intensive family-based services, but that is not an established position. Obviously, it takes a little while for one of these branches to settle down. They have to work out how the interface with the region is effective and how they interface with the other policy branches.

One of the interesting things is we are now starting to see the policy branches and the operations areas coming to the Aboriginal Services Branch for advice about how you might tackle a particular issue or a particular policy area, and that is a big step forward within an organisation like DOCS, so it seems that the Aboriginal Services Branch is starting to have an impact. That is the centralised unit that we have established. The second thing that we are doing, obviously, is improving the recruitment of caseworkers, and I have talked enough about that. The next thing that we need to do is to work hard on the retention strategies. There are two parts to this, in a sense. It would be good to bring in Aboriginal caseworkers, train them and then release them to other parts of the bureaucracy. That is a function that DOCS could undertake, and undertake it well in the future. But we also need experienced Aboriginal caseworkers in DOCS. We need to get in and we need to keep more than we have base positions for, I guess.

One of the key things is an Aboriginal mentoring strategy. The thing that seems to cause most of the difficulty for new Aboriginal caseworkers coming into DOCS is feeling isolated, even within a metropolitan CSC, or feeling isolated within a rural CSC, particularly where they have difficult community issues to deal with and they need somebody to talk to about issues Aboriginal, apart from issues that are just around DOCS. So the mentoring proposal, which the Aboriginal Services Branch is working on, will be crucial to solving that problem.

The fourth thing we need to do is to train Aboriginal staff to become serious competitors for mainstream promotional positions. One of the things that we have clearly in mind is getting Aboriginal caseworkers who want to progress to be managers casework and managers client services, and so on; that is, they can progress so that they can compete openly and successfully for those positions. We are partially successful in this in that quite a few managers casework are now Aboriginal, and in the last round of managers client services there were some successes for Aboriginal applicants in the mainstream process.

Another way in which we support Aboriginal staff is at a series of Aboriginal forums, established regionally and also centrally. There is an elected representative group that reports to me—the Aboriginal Reference Group, which has representatives from each region. I meet with them every two months. They deal with difficult issues for Aboriginal staff that are coming up in the lift, if you like, from the ground. You get to hear about them first-hand and start to take some action about them. The final thing we have is the Aboriginal staff conference, which is on at the moment in Sydney. There are 150 Aboriginal staff attending that conference. It is themed each year to add another set of developmental skills to the Aboriginal caseworkers. This year, it is around the effectiveness of communication between DOCS staff and Aboriginal communities, and enhancing the skills of the Aboriginal staff in relation to those issues.

CHAIR: If I could interrupt you for a moment. Mr West might have a question on that.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I would like to know where that conference is, and whether or not we could get any feedback from the conference that is taking place.

Dr SHEPHERD: I am going to the conference dinner after this, so I will see whether I can get feedback. This time, the conference is in metropolitan Sydney, in Haymarket. In previous years it has been in other parts of Sydney. It is probably best to hold it in Sydney because that is the easiest way to shift people in and out, and it also gives participants access to all the major speakers who might be available.

CHAIR: Do you want Dr Shepherd to take on notice some key themes on which to get feedback for us as to what the Aboriginal staff feel?

The Hon. IAN WEST: Or perhaps refer us to an appropriate person, say a convenor or someone who has been involved in developing this particular conference, so that we might be able to speak to them.

Dr SHEPHERD: Yes, if you think that would help.

CHAIR: We originally intended to have the manager of the branch here, but because the hearing clashed with the holding of the conference that was impossible to do.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Madam Chair, could I express some concern that, although our terms of reference are in relation to Redfern and Waterloo, we have only a short time left to deal with some specific Redfern and Waterloo issues that relate to DOCS? General information is great, but it is not helpful in answering questions on issues that form part of our terms of reference.

CHAIR: You are quite right. The last part of the question asked how the Aboriginal Service planned to assist Aboriginal children and families in areas such as Redfern and Waterloo. I guess that is the question you want Dr Shepherd to get onto.

Dr SHEPHERD: I was answering the question as it was laid out. There are some things that we are doing specifically in Redfern and Waterloo around assisting staff. I will get Anne-Marie Sabellico to talk about those, if you like. The Aboriginal Services Branch does not actually go into Redfern and Waterloo and do things in there—unless on an invitation to them to assist with particular issues or whatever. That is not their function. Their function is to provide the strategies and the systems to assist Aboriginal staff. But their impact will have an impact on what DOCS staff do in Redfern and Waterloo. I will pass over to Ms Sabellico.

Ms SABELLICO: I have already covered one aspect, which is trying to get more Aboriginal people interested in coming to work for DOCS, particularly in Redfern and Waterloo. One of the other regional strategies we have for Aboriginal staff is a regular Aboriginal staff meeting. All Aboriginal staff from across the region get together one day every two months and spend part of the day talking about issues that are present for them in their work, and then in the afternoon myself or Trina Whitton, who is the Manager, Client Service representative on that committee, would attend to answer any questions that arise.

Specifically, we also have a mentor program operating, given that we have some fairly senior staff in our Yallamundi service, which is based in Redfern and Waterloo but does cover metropolitan-central. They provide a level of advice and consultancy to newer Aboriginal staff that we have on board. We also support any of our Aboriginal staff in relation to studies or courses that they wish to attend, and we specifically look at the types of training needed and try to fulfil those as part of a main strategy through our own learning and development budgets, making it a priority.

We have also undertaken, particularly in this last year, some significant community events in Redfern and Waterloo. One of the decisions that has been supported by not only Aboriginal caseworkers but non-Aboriginal caseworkers is participating in those particular events on such a scale that staff are out there and working within the community, meeting the community, and meeting other people there operating through other agencies and services.

CHAIR: What sort of events do you mean—like the recent festival, or the football carnival?

Ms SABELLICO: Yes. We attended the NADOC Week festivities. We established a stall and ran a barbecue at that event. Also, for Child Protection Week, we ran an event. We hired a tribal warriors boat, which is an indigenous service that provides access to some boating facilities on the harbour. We took about 90 local families and their children on that. That was staffed by both Street Team staff and local caseworkers who were interested. As well, at the recent football knockout over the long weekend we had about 28 DOCS staff working effectively 16-hour days to support the activities, being out in the community and providing information where required, and we helped support some of the other campaigns that were running that weekend, like the family violence campaign, and things like that. Those are some of the things we do to try to address issues in training as well as providing some practical experience and getting to know the community and the people within the community. Relationship-building is quite an essential part of the job.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: When you said there was a 410 per cent increase in level 1 cases between 1996 and—

Dr SHEPHERD: No—in reports, not in level 1 cases.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In reports?

Dr SHEPHERD: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Would that not suggest that there was a difference in reporting, rather than a difference in incidence?

CHAIR: We are getting a long way away from our terms of reference. This sounds like our previous inquiry.

Dr SHEPHERD: That is right. Undoubtedly, there have been changes in the reporting requirements over the past decade, and each time you change the reporting requirements you will see an increase in reports. You also get an increase in reports in response to major events, like the police royal commission and so on. If you look at the graph, it follows the pattern. Underlying that there appears to be a steady, but much lower, percentage increase in child abuse and neglect. The only reason you can pick that up—and it is not perfect, statistically—is that the substantiation rate continues to climb as we go forward. But the rate of increase in substantiation is well below the rate of increase in reporting.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Perhaps the fact that DOCS had gone down in the early 90s might be related to these factors.

CHAIR: Can you relate this to Redfern and Waterloo?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Yes, I shall. If DOCS were not functioning very well in the early 90s, this might be a reaction to that, might it not?

Dr SHEPHERD: You may recall that DOCS was significantly slashed, for want of a better word, in the late 1980s early 1990s. We can get the exact figures, but something like 15 community service centres were closed, a thousand staff were taken out of the organisation, and so there was a significant downgrading of the organisation's capacity to deal with child protection issues. The legacy is that that obviously took some time to deal with.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Will the future parameters be well monitored by the client information system? I gather that you still have not really got information from that system.

CHAIR: I really must say you are revisiting our former inquiry. We still have to deal with eight or nine specific questions that we sent to Dr Shepherd and others dealing specifically with Redfern and Waterloo. I really think we have to come back to the terms of reference—unless you want to ask our nasty question 15, which I must admit is totally outside our terms of reference but we included anyway. That is why we have never had a government response to our report tabled in December 2002.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I have been trying to get from the Minister an answer as to when the client information system—

CHAIR: I am sorry. Although the client information system may have a lot to do with DOCS, it is not in any sense related to our terms of reference. We now have 20 minutes left in which to deal with an enormous number of questions. This is not an opportunity for you to ask questions that should probably be asked in the Chamber or at some other Committee hearing. Do you want to make it specifically relevant to Redfern and Waterloo?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: We have had evidence about the Community Service Grants Program [CSGP], which I gather funds the non-government organisations and whose funding only really attracts CPI increases, despite the hugely increased demand, particularly in certain areas such as Redfern and Waterloo with the change in demographics of the people there. Is this a major preventive strategy? If so, why is it not getting more funding?

Dr SHEPHERD: The CSGP funding is only one of the avenues of funding for the support services that are needed for families and for children. Clearly, the Government has committed substantial additional funds to family support services and to the early intervention program, the extra \$150 million that I spoke about earlier. There are other funds as well that have been committed, both in the past in relation to children's services, and in the future in relation to children's services. The CSGP is just one of the strands of funding that goes into that general mix. It is true that CSGP funding has increased by CPI adjustments, or the equivalent of whatever the Treasury indexation figures are, and that it has not had a substantial injection of funds for some time. But it is not the sole source of funding, and there have been some substantial increases in the other sources of funding that cover a lot of the same territory—not all of it, but a lot of it.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The non-government organisations have also said that the community project officers used to develop a good relationship with the non-government organisations and evaluate their work, but that now the tendering process favours the bigger non-government organisations that can go across areas, and that in fact the good work of the smaller organisations is not being recognised. Do you think that is true?

Dr SHEPHERD: I might let Anne-Marie Sabellico talk about the local areas specifically, but at one stage there was a push to go to open tender for a lot of these services. It is quite clear that if you go to open tender for services that involve small non-government organisations you will create a problem; either they will put in a tender that can win but which they cannot support, and so the service falls over, or the process is too big and too difficult for them to get into. My view is that open tender is only useful for the very big projects where you would expect the big non-government organisations that can participate in that process to participate. We are about to evaluate the expression of interest process that we ran recently in relation to high-needs children's services. We have put to the non-government sector that we should conduct an open workshop in December from their perspective and from ours to see whether there is a better way to run expression of interest processes that suit both of us. That will take place in mid December.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Some of the NGO's have been scathing about the tendering process and, in particular, about the recent funding given to organisations not within Redfern-Waterloo, such as Barnardos. They have said that the service provided by Barnardos is fantastic, but they are disappointed that funding did not go to organisations already providing those sorts of services to enhance what they already do on a shoestring budget. They have felt excluded.

Dr SHEPHERD: A lot of money has been spent direct purchasing of services to non-government agencies in the past six months. That is another avenue we can use, and do use, when we think it is appropriate. The problem is that while for the smaller players direct purchasing of services might be perceived to be the best outcome, as soon as we do direct purchase—there was a classic case a few weeks ago—we get complaints from the other non-government service providers who believe it should have been done either by open tender or expression of interest. There is no single size that fits all of the non-government organisations with regard to the distribution of funding. I can probably show the committee as much criticism about open tender, expressions of interest and direct purchasing and so on.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Direct purchasing still has not provided a fund split. In a sense you are still looking at the unit cost of provision of services. The NGOs have complained that the reporting requirements are written as though you are trying to get a unit cost. Then, of course, you are comparing them. They say that if a relationship were built up with the community project officers such that you trusted them they could work more efficiently and spend less time reporting and more time delivering.

Dr SHEPHERD: We are in the process of working with the non-government sector through the minimum data set required for funding services. I agree, we would probably ask for much more information than is useful. We need to get to a position with the non-government sector generally where there is agreement about what is reasonable to require in reporting, given that this involves New South Wales government funding, and what is extraneous to the process. That will be worked out with the non-government sector over the next six months.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In that minimal data set, are you looking at the data sets required by other developments? One NGO representative said that they had six different programs with nine different reporting requirements. For example, one program might require people to be in the age group 21 to 40 and another might want them to be 25 to 45. It means the whole thing has to be done twice. Can all the people asking things of NGOs get together and get reasonable data sets such that the reporting is simpler?

Dr SHEPHERD: If that is a significant problem—I am not sure just how significant it is—

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: All the NGOs have talked about it.

CHAIR: That is a slight exaggeration.

Dr SHEPHERD: We meet with the NGOs on a regular basis. I meet very regularly with about six groups of NGOs. One of the things we will be meeting about over the next year is funding reform generally—how we are going to handle the huge additional amounts of money that will go to the non-government sector by year five. By year five there will be about \$750 million going to purchase services or to provide grants to the non-government sector out of DOCS. So, there is a substantial amount of work to do between now and then to ensure that what we have is a robust but a good system for the distribution of that funding.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Costing prevention is a big issue. Apparently NGOs are being asked how many bad outcomes have been stopped by what they are doing. In a sense, the answer is almost impossible to provide. I agree it is better to ask that than to put in N squared dollars, measuring input to demonstrate outcome. To measure a non-existent outcome, which is a risk-management question, is beyond their expertise. If you want to move to a preventive model, what costings are you doing?

Dr SHEPHERD: The performance indicators and the evaluation of some of the prevention programs are very difficult. If you are attempting to prevent something, is it difficult to measure without a long-term study or a big enough sample size. The economics unit within DOCS and the people who deal with performance evaluations are looking at the international literature about ways to measure these kinds of programs. The economics unit will produce a fully fledged package soon, which will deal with how we evaluate the benefits of these types of programs. It is easy to identify the costs; it is very difficult to identify the short- and long-term benefits. However, we will have the best model available.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Are you willing to set up cohort studies?

Dr SHEPHERD: The Government probably wants to announce its own things on the research studies we are going to fund. We intend to fund a number of significant research studies looking at the kinds of programs that we are putting in place and their long-term benefits.

CHAIR: A number of people, particularly those represented in Koori interagencies, have expressed concern that, despite the efforts that have been made, there is still a failure to place Aboriginal children with Aboriginal foster families. It has been suggested that this is a huge problem in the Redfern-Waterloo area.

Dr SHEPHERD: It is certainly a bigger problem in Redfern-Waterloo than it is statewide. If you start from the proposition that New South Wales is the best jurisdiction in terms of complying with the Aboriginal placement principle, on average we place 87 per cent of Aboriginal children with Aboriginal carers. That is more than 2,700 children. About 752, all up, are not placed with Aboriginal carers. We still do not have enough Aboriginal foster carers, either auspiced through DOCS or the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal non-government sector agencies. The problem in Eastern Sydney CSC is that only 57 per cent of children are placed in accordance with the Aboriginal placement principle.

CHAIR: How many children is that in Eastern Sydney?

Dr SHEPHERD: There are 25 children in non-Aboriginal placements. Of those, six are long term, and 19 are interim, that is, while the court process is being dealt with. So, we would anticipate of those 19, if we can find appropriate Aboriginal foster placements for them and the court determines that the children should not go back to their birth families, we should do better than that.

CHAIR: Why is Redfern-Waterloo doing so conspicuously less well?

Dr SHEPHERD: The main Aboriginal provider of foster care is the Aboriginal Children's Service. It is currently the subject of a commonwealth-state review with ATSIC involvement, so it is not operating at capacity. The intention is to get it to a point at which it can operate at capacity. That will give us access to more foster carers. We have exhausted the supply of Aboriginal foster carers we can get through DOCS. Because of the history, getting Aboriginal foster carers through DOCS is not as easy as it is for non-Aboriginal foster carers.

CHAIR: Are there fewer functional extended families in the Redfern-Waterloo area, given the pattern of people coming and going?

Ms SABELLICO: The figures relate to matters before court. In most of our placements for the Aboriginal community, we look at kinship or family-based placements in the first place. So, a higher proportion of the number of children we have in care arrangements are in kinship or family-based placements.

CHAIR: Is that harder to achieve in the Redfern-Waterloo area?

Ms SABELLICO: It is no different from anywhere else in the State. The staff are very good at identifying the appropriate family relations we can link into and talk to in terms of whether they can take on those placements. After running out of family-based options, we look at whether we have any Aboriginal foster care, either departmental or agency based. We negotiate with regional foster care services to access any appropriate placements that may be available. We also look at any other

Aboriginal services that may be able to assist with different options that we do not have on the table before we would look at another option. There is also a high proportion of sibling groups in the number quoted. We look to place a sibling group together. All those issues add to the complexity of the matter.

CHAIR: Are the statistics getting better or worse in terms of the Aboriginal placement principle for your area?

Ms SABELLICO: I would have to go back a couple of years to establish that. These are the figures at present.

CHAIR: Can you take that question on notice?

Dr SHEPHERD: Yes.

CHAIR: It is very different from the New South Wales average. Obviously some areas are much higher than 87 per cent.

Dr SHEPHERD: It is a significant problem and we are trying to address it as best we can. Once the review of Aboriginal Children's Services is complete—and we have a project officer seconded to that from DOCS to drive that review—

CHAIR: Why is that affecting the Redfern-Waterloo area more than other areas?

Dr SHEPHERD: Because they are the main source of Aboriginal auspiced foster carers in that area. DOCS organises its foster carer arrangements regionally. Aboriginal Children's Services was the main supplier within metro central.

CHAIR: I refer to the street team and the evidence presented to the committee. Of course, DOCS is the leader. You said in June that you had undertaken a review and that you were going to provide an enhanced service. A number of witnesses have expressed concern about the expense of the operation and suggested that the staff are not being used efficiently. The committee has asked for data on the young people accessing it. Perhaps you can take those questions together.

Ms SABELLICO: I will attempt to cover both questions in the response. The Department of Community Services is the lead agency for the Redfern-Waterloo street team. In fact, there are five employer agencies. We have the Department of Community Services, Department of Health, the Metropolitan Aboriginal Land Council, the South Sydney Youth Service and the Aboriginal Resource Centre. We have established, therefore, an operational management group, like a management committee for that service. We meet on a monthly basis and have a look at the operational issues as well as the future planning for the service, with the understanding as well that the street team is on non-recurrent funding. In terms of our planning we are trying to look ahead, and be forward thinking, but at the same time acknowledging that we are also at this point open to the human services review and the finding of that as well.

We have had a number of planning sessions, and from that a fair few changes have occurred on the street team. We have, in fact, changed rostering practices to make sure that we have got staff on at the greater need times that have been identified through the information that we were collecting statistically, as well as anecdotally through the operational management group, and the information that those employer agencies were able to bring to the table. We have also then ensured that with our rostering practise we can provide increased support to the special events and functions that occur within the community and be able to then ensure that we can put on high level staffing where required and be a bit more flexible around those times and hours. The manager casework for the team, in fact, has been working on shift as well to provide better coverage and, also to then view and do on-the-ground review of the work that has been done by the street team staff.

We have also created a temporary project officer position, and that position is pulling together a program of events that the street team has established, or will establish into the future. They are things like cooking classes at the local community centre, or self-esteem classes for a group of young girls also held at the community centre. Joint activities with the PCYC, supporting other

functions, so there is a calendar of events that has now been developed that is available and supported. We are going to put it out the front of the street team itself, and print flyers to send to people on a monthly basis so they are aware of where the street team will be and what activities they will be supporting.

They have also changed the way in which they do their outreach work. Whereas before they would just go and do a walk around the community, they now target areas, knowing where functions will be, so getting the intelligence from speaking to police and other community agencies about activities occurring, and targeting more their outreach to those areas, as well as then making sure that the activities they are developing are tried to be done within those areas that the young people are congregating. We believe that has been quite successful. In terms of the street team and its cost, as I said, there are five employer agencies, so it probably has a higher than average infrastructure cost as well because each agency would have some costs associated to the provision of staff and the management of all the payroll. In terms of the street team and its cost, as I said, there are five employer agencies, so it probably has a higher than average infrastructure cost as well because each agency would have some costs associated to the provision of staff and the management of all the payroll.

CHAIR: How many staff?

Ms SABELLICO: There are 11 staff in the street team, including administrative staff, the manager case work and a case work specialist. They would work about 14-18 hours a day. So apart from the administrative staff, all the other staff are on shifts, which accrue penalties attached to them as well. The budget for the street team also covers the client-related program area, and some brokerage funds that are available for access for clients of the street team and other services. In terms of the level of work that they have got to cover, say, the past three months, the contact statistics I have available to me are about 300 young people in August, 421 in September and 637 in October. The increase for September and October has been significantly because they are now focussing on the special events and activities that are being preplanned and organised across the board.

CHAIR: How do you counter a contact or an access? Have a number of people come to the stall at the football carnival?

Ms SABELLICO: No, where we may have come in contact with a child five times on the same day or weekend, it is only still counted as one contact. The contacts represent your contact with the young person, a discussion with the young person—not just seeing them on the street—as well as we are now counting based on the level of intervention that may be required, and the referrals made. The other big changes that we are trying now to also provide, the role of the specialist workers on the street team, which are the employees of people like the South Sydney Youth Service and the Department of Health, greater amount of time within their home agencies so that they can then get access to the training requirements around their specialist areas, such as adolescent health and drug and alcohol issues.

CHAIR: It may be possible to take the question about Yallamundi and Barnardo's on notice, given what it asks. The committee is still waiting for the report of the Human Services Review and is still, to some extent, in the dark about the work it did and what it will result in. What is your involvement in that review? Would you give us a perspective of the Department of Community Services on what has happened with that?

Ms SABELLICO: Initially, as part of the Human Services Senior Officers Group for Redfern-Waterloo, and as a member of that group I would have participated in terms of looking at the scope of the Human Services Review. What were the areas that needed covering? What were the issues that should be addressed in the development of draft terms of reference? I also participated in the completion of questionnaires: one for DOCS as an agency and one for street team as the lead agency. I also from that had to follow up phone conversations with the consultants to clarify any point within the questionnaires or information that they required confirmation around.

One of the directors of partnership and planning within the region, I was also involved through attending a couple of the local forum and provided information that way as the supporter of the funded agencies, and in their role as supporting funded agencies. They also provided the list of all

funded and licensed agencies within Redfern-Waterloo, or external to Redfern-Waterloo but covering Waterloo to give the information in terms of total funding, or access to services.

CHAIR: Have you had any involvement with the review since it was originally expected in June?

Ms SABELLICO: Just the provision of the information.

CHAIR: That is some time ago?

Ms SABELLICO: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you have any comments on the recent announcement of the Premier to establish a Redfern-Waterloo Authority?

Dr SHEPHERD: No, I do not think so.

CHAIR: How will this affect the work of your department?

Dr SHEPHERD: I think that is a matter of government policy, and I am yet to see the full detail of exactly what is proposed. I have seen the announcement, and that is all.

CHAIR: The announcement seems not to talk much about the human services side of things. A number of people, in the relative short time since it has been out, have commented to the committee about it having a more infrastructure-focussed purpose. The role of DOCS is obviously more human services focussed.

Dr SHEPHERD: Correct. I was hoping to go to a briefing after this meeting around the Redfern-Waterloo proposals. As you would be aware, Michael Ramsey, who I understood was to give evidence to this committee this afternoon, is in hospital so that briefing will not occur. Until there is an opportunity for that I am not in a position to work out exactly what the detail is of anything that might affect DOCS. So I cannot actually answer your question.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Have you seen the Human Services Review report?

Dr SHEPHERD: No.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Do you know what is the status of that report?

Dr SHEPHERD: No, I do not.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Would you have expected to see it by now?

Dr SHEPHERD: Not necessarily. I mean if it is not complete, and I have no idea whether it is, then obviously I am not going to see it. It is not something that DOCS is producing, so when it comes from the agency that is producing it, I will have a look at it. So I am in no better position than you are at the moment.

CHAIR: I admit question 15 is totally outside our terms of reference.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I would not admit that if I were you.

CHAIR: When will the committee get the Government's response to our DOCS report?

Dr SHEPHERD: I cannot tell you when you might get it, but I can tell you what is happening, if that helps. From our point of view, many of the issues that were raised in the Social Issues Committee, we are beaver away and implementing. The bottom line is the Government announced a very substantial package following reforms and funding following the report of the Social Issues Committee. Clearly, many of the things in there have been accepted and we are moving on and implementing them. It is DOCS that is at fault here, in that it has not finalised—while it has

been busy doing things—the written report. I discussed this when I ran into the Minister in the street prior to coming here. She certainly has not got a copy of it at this stage but hopefully will get a copy of it within the next month.

CHAIR: Given that it was due in six months it would be nice to get it within two years.

Dr SHEPHERD: Yes, I understand that.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: We did get a pretty general response to the mental health inquiry.

Dr SHEPHERD: Yes.

CHAIR: You and the Minister will make all speed and get a response?

Dr SHEPHERD: Correct, the fault is with DOCS entirely. As soon as we have completed the draft response, and the Minister has had a chance to look at it, I am sure she will provide the response.

CHAIR: You have taken questions on notice, in particular, one in relation to young people between 10 and 17 years that we did not ask. Can we take it that you will prepare replies within two weeks?

Dr SHEPHERD: Yes, the only one we might have a difficulty with is we have to trawl back through those Aboriginal placement historical records. The rest of it we can provide without a difficulty.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.27 p.m.)