

CORRECTED PROOF
GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 2

Friday 12 October 2012

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES, WOMEN

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. M. A. Ficarra (Chair)

The Hon. J. Barham
The Hon. D. Clarke
The Hon. S. Cotsis
The Hon. J. A. Gardiner

Reverend The Hon. F. J. Nile
The Hon. A. Searle
The Hon. H. Westwood

PRESENT

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

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

CHAIR: I declare this hearing of the inquiry into budget estimates 2012-13 open to the public. I welcome Ms Pru Goward and all the accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Family and Community Services and Women. Family and Community Services will be examined between 2.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m. and the portfolio of Women from 4.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. Before we commence with questions I need to make some comments about procedural matters. The first is the broadcasting of proceedings. In accordance with the Legislative Council guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, only Committee members and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of the Committee you must take responsibility for what you publish or what interpretation you place on anything that is said before the Committee. The guidelines for broadcast of proceedings are available on the table by the door.

Any messages from advisers or members' staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber and support staff or the Committee clerks. Minister Goward, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you at any time. Transcript of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning. Minister, the House has resolved that answers to questions on notice must be provided within 21 days. I remind everyone to turn off their mobile phones, or put them on silent. All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn in prior to giving evidence. Minister, you do not need to be sworn in as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. The following witnesses do not need to be sworn as they have been sworn in at a previous budget estimates: Mr Jim Moore, Ms Maura Boland, Mr Alastair Hunter. I ask all other witnesses to state your full name, job title and agency, and swear either an oath or an affirmation. I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Ageing, and Disability Services open for examination. As there is no provision for a Minister to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questioning, questions will begin once witnesses are sworn in.

JIM MOORE, Director General, Department of Family and Community Services,

ALASTAIR HUNTER, Deputy Director General, Corporate Services, Department of Family and Community Services, and

MAURA BOLAND, Deputy Director General, Strategy and Policy, Department of Family and Community Services on former oath:

KERRY BOLAND, New South Wales Children's Guardian, part of the Office of Communities, and

MIKE ALLEN, Chief Executive, Housing NSW and Acting Chief Executive, Aboriginal Housing Office, sworn and examined:

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

VICKI D'ADAM, Deputy Director General, Strategic Policy and Coordination Group, Department of Premier and Cabinet, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Family and Community Services and Women open for examination. There is no provision for the Minister to make an opening statement before the Committee. We will begin with questioning from the Opposition.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Minister, are you aware of a document called "FACS Community Services Division: further savings strategies" dated 18 July 2012?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: That is a document that outlines \$500 million of cuts to expenditure in your agency, does it not?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That document of course has no status. It is a document that is at the official level only; it was not commissioned by me. It was not requested by me and was not seen by me until yesterday after the *Sydney Morning Herald* approached me. This is a document with no status. It is a working paper. It is meant to address the challenge we have of fixing a \$1.9 billion black hole left to us by the previous Government.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: That is just nonsense: there is no such black hole. What you describe is simply the gap between the demand for services or the need for them and your Government's unwillingness to actually fund them at an appropriate level. That is correct, is it not?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No. It is certainly true that if we had allowed the increase in out-of-home care to increase at 15 per cent per annum as it had that there would be increasing pressure on service delivery. It is also true that costs were rising much faster than revenue, 9 per cent versus 5 per cent, an answer I believe I gave last year. This is a document that looks at savings measures, but in my view what we should be doing is looking at reform measures. We are not planning to make cuts of this order, but since this is not a document I have seen, authored, authorised or requested, I will ask Jim Moore, the director general, to take the detail of that question.

Mr MOORE: The document that also came to my attention yesterday after the *Sydney Morning Herald* acquired it is, as the Minister described, an internal document. It is the product of some work that has been taken within Community Services. It is quite inaccurate in a number of regards. The document, for example, makes reference to a \$25 million loan. There is no such loan. There is no such requirement imposed on Community Services to make such a repayment because there was no loan in the first place and therefore there is no consequent budget requirement arising out of that.

The document also reasonably clearly indicates a distinction between efficiency measures that are arising from government and whole-of-government action such as efficiency dividends and the budget pressures that arise from the difference between what has been estimated or allowed in estimates for expenditure and what, if nothing was changed in terms of practice program settings, would be the likely cost that would be

incurred. The document is of some significant disappointment to me in the sense that it shows a program of action which is driven around the "same old, same old"—there is no better word for it than that where the work that is being done is looking at how to cut services and reduce activity.

They are not exclusively the things that I looked at but it is a substantial part. As the document notes, measures such as that were measures that had been rejected by the Minister or me or both at various times. The document I think relates to a period in the early part of this financial year. Conversations with me from the chief executive of Community Services have led to a greater degree of clarity that the business of working within an area such as Community Services is not to be the business of seeking cuts, as they are often described; it is not to be in the business of cutting services. It is to be in the business of looking towards reforms. Those reforms are to be of the sort that results in people who are vulnerable and in need of our services being positioned so that they are in need of less service because we have been able to support them better.

That will produce the expenditure outcomes that we are looking for. It will be good news, as opposed to a cutting environment. Earlier today, in the light of just how much media coverage has come to this document, I advised Community Services staff that indeed the document is one that is misconceived and is not being actioned. The group of people that the document makes reference to—if it has not formally been abandoned—does not meet because, again, it is a group focused on something that is not the priority. The priority is not finding cuts.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Mr Moore, are you saying this document is a complete fabrication; senior people in your department woke up one day and decided they would fabricate this document? Do these services not exist? The detail here is pretty accurate, from my understanding of your department, so where did it come from? Did someone just wake up with a whim one morning to create it?

Mr MOORE: If I in any way implied that it was a fabrication I am sorry for misleading you because it was in no way what I was intending to say. I was describing a situation where a group of people within the organisation, looking to the challenges that they saw the organisation facing, were going down a pathway that I have stopped. The Minister has put the direction very clearly that the department has to take this area into the public arena and on the parliamentary record around things such as the labour expenses cap. These are not things that have come at the expense of reductions in volumes and qualities of front-line services. I certainly do not want an organisation that I have to take account for which focuses on approaching its challenge around budgets and cuts to meet budgets. We can be more clever than that.

As I said, I am trying to imply, reasonably clearly, the group of people who were tasked with proceeding down that path were misconceived. That group is now being redirected and we are in the process of looking at alternative structures for how we organise community services so that we do not have people who think this is the same old, same old. These are the measures I have seen come up several times since I became the Director General. I am sure they have come up many times before. They are not the policy reforms that I want energy spent on. I am not saying in any way, shape or form that the staff, as you implied, got out of bed one day and felt the need to write something like that. The document shows to me the extent to which they think that is the approach they should be taking when it is clearly not the approach.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Minister, the document states that the Expenditure Review Committee signed off on a savings target of more than \$400 million over the forward estimates in March of this year. Is that correct or not?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will let the Director General answer the question.

Mr MOORE: In simple terms, the document is incorrect, as I said, in a number of regards, including that there is no savings target signed off by any part of government for Community Services. Community Services does not exist as a separate entity for financial budgets. It is part of Family and Community Services [FACS] and requirements to manage finances are the business of FACS, the whole department and not a subset of the department.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have a 1.2 per cent labour-relation expenses requirement to meet, and that applies across the Government.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: What do you say is the formal savings target set by Cabinet or the Expenditure Review Committee for Family and Community Services?

Ms PRU GOWARD: The 1.2 per cent cut; you have got the papers.

Mr MOORE: In addition, there are things such as the efficiency dividends that have been in train for a number of—

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: What is it in dollar terms over the forward estimates? As an agency, how much money do you have to save over the forward estimates?

Mr MOORE: There are a range of measures, as I said, in terms of efficiency dividends: the labour expense cap and there are some procurement reforms. I am happy to have those dug out and collated for you, but there is not a single target at all.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: We are happy for you to take that on notice.

Mr MOORE: It is nowhere near the numbers people are talking about. If you allow me to make one thing clear, when you see in that paper headline numbers like 400, that 400 number does not exist as a target but it is also not a savings requirement. A significant part of it is a financial assessment of what worst-case scenarios would indicate would be the expenditures should no action be taken. Those worst-case scenarios are not ones we would want to have happen. We are taking action to put alternative work practices in place, all the way to alternative program settings that should mitigate those financial pressures.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: To be clear, Minister, can you rule out any cuts to the Child Protection Hotline which deals with reports of kids at risk of abuse and neglect?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I can rule out abolishing the Child Protection Helpline. It is an incredibly important tool and it has enabled us to identify children at risk of significant harm much more rapidly. Can I rule out any cuts anywhere? Obviously we need to constantly review our programs and our operations. For example, if there are changes in the number of reports made to the Helpline, if we are able to negotiate better arrangements with the Public Service Association about the deployment of staff at the Helpline, that can all impact on the amount of money it requires to run the Helpline; and this would apply to any area of the department, as it should. Reviews and reform must be continuous and it would be an incredibly irresponsible Government that ruled out anything.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: We are talking about the current budget year. As Minister in the current budget year, can you rule out any cuts to child sexual assault services that are currently provided by your agency?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I cannot rule out anything, because everything needs to be reviewed and assessed and we need to be reassured always that we are using those dollars the most effective way we can.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: That would also apply to the Brighter Futures program that puts families in crisis back together again so that kids do not have to go into care?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Brighter Futures is in the process of being transferred to the non-government sector.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: We are talking about the level of resource being provided by the Government.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think you will find we are keeping it at \$10 million. I invite the Director General to add to the answer.

Mr MOORE: I will elaborate on, for example, the Brighter Futures program so we can be very clear what is going on there. To this regard, the paper that you have has been misrepresented. We have identified in the Brighter Futures program areas where contracted levels of service are not being supplied, and it would be entirely rational to not pay for those parts that are not being supplied. I would not call that a cut. That is ensuring that the contracts are properly applied. If you look into things like the helpline, we also are aware of very substantial and undesirable levels of overtime, and we would be looking at ways to remove the need to spend money on overtime. We are not looking to reduce the level of activity in the helpline but, indeed, looking to

make sure we have sufficient staff so that we do not need to rely on overtime and put staff in a situation where they work excessive additional hours.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Minister, Justice Wood has recommended that carers' allowances should be reviewed periodically and reflect actual costs to the carer, which is why the previous Labor Government indexed allowances from 2006. Will you commit to continuing the indexation of those allowances?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, what are the casework vacancy rates for Bourke Community Services Centre [CSC]?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Caseworker vacancy rates by community services centres, as you would appreciate, are very difficult to identify on any particular day, and that is because we have to manually do that. What I can say is that the number of caseworkers across the State is about the same as it was two years ago when Labor was in office. Therefore, you would expect, on average, the vacancy rate to be about the same. That is simple arithmetic.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: As I understand it, you do get regular reports. Surely someone within your department would know. As I understand it, the workforce planning branch does collate that material. I understand they have a recruitment report which lists all the notified vacancies. Surely you would have those numbers. In high demand areas, such as Bourke, I thought you would know what those numbers are.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have regional allocations. You might like the Director General or Ms Maree Walk—

Mr MOORE: I do not want to appear difficult in not answering the question directly, but I need to put it in context so that what seems to be a simple query being met with an answer that we cannot do it is not actually my trying to be difficult. As to the core requirement in terms of management of staffing within the department, things around salaried dollars, not around positions, that is an old approach to management which we are moving away from.

We do not focus on and we do not have the systems in place to be able to focus readily on positions, vacancies and so on because that is not the direction we need to take. Secondly, local management is supervised by regional managers and it is their responsibility to decide how to deal with staffing situations in local community service centres. To that end, we literally do not focus a lot of energy and effort on the question of how many vacancies there are as measured by a system somewhere, because those systems are antiquated and hold establishment data that is often historical and irrelevant.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You must have some measurement to understand the caseworker vacancy rate. With all due respect, we hear a great deal from this Government about protecting front-line services. What is more front-line than a caseworker in Bourke? Surely you know the vacancy rate.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I surely know the number of caseworkers in New South Wales, which has not changed. You referred to front-line staff. They are important and of course we reserve the right to redeploy people to areas of high demand when that is necessary.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: And Bourke is not an area of high demand?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, it is.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Then surely you know the vacancy rate.

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is a different question. The Labor Government's legacy—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You are in government now.

CHAIR: We will have one person asking a question and one person answering.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am repeating the director general's observation that we do not have a system that enables us to do that. In fact, it is not—

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: There is a document from within your agency entitled "Filling vacant positions in regions and helpline procedures and guidelines". It refers on the second page to the regional caseworker vacancy and candidate data. This document was reviewed most recently on 30 June this year. It clearly states that your agency records regional caseworker vacancies. What is the vacancy rate in Bourke? I am happy for you to take the question on notice. Do you or the director general have any idea how many front-line staff—

Ms PRU GOWARD: I can take the question on notice, but Bourke is not a region.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I know it is a community services centre. You must know how many people you have on the ground.

CHAIR: Perhaps the Minister can take the question on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: It is a ridiculous proposition that no-one in this room knows the caseworker vacancy rate at the Bourke Community Services Centre or anywhere else in the State.

CHAIR: Can the question in relation to Bourke be taken on notice and a response provided?

Mr MOORE: It will take some effort, but we are happy to provide material showing vacancy levels in the best way that they can be measured. However, as I tried to point out earlier, we do not focus on vacancies. The critical management information is around expenditure on salary.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I am happy for you to provide on notice the regional caseworker vacancy and candidate data reports for the past financial year. This document states that it includes the numbers of all vacancies and eligibility and transfer data for each location in the region.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I want to be very clear that no-one in this room can tell the Committee the caseworker vacancies in high-need areas such as Bourke, Moree and Narrabri. They are currently overseeing Toomelah. It is beyond belief that no-one can tell the Committee the vacancy rates in these high-need areas. Is that not your core business?

Mr MOORE: With all due respect to the Committee, it is not true as was stated earlier that we do not know the number of staff on the ground.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Then tell the Committee what it is.

Mr MOORE: To be clear, I have indicated that we do not focus on vacancy rates as they are traditionally measured. However, in terms of the number—

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: With respect—

CHAIR: Allow Mr Moore to continue. This is an important criticism, so the witness should be allowed to answer.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: The witness is fencing. He said that he does not focus on vacancy rates. However, if he knows the establishment and who is on the ground, surely those two bits of data would tell him how many positions are vacant by location.

CHAIR: Now allow Mr Moore to answer.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I am happy for him to do so.

Mr MOORE: In answer to the first question, I can say precisely how many staff there are in total and I can tell you very quickly how many staff there are in particular locations. I asked the indulgence of the Committee earlier to understand that what may seem a simple question cannot be answered easily. The simple sum that the member indicated should be provided cannot be provided quickly with any real meaning because

the establishment data system is, to be precise, rubbish. It is a reflection of historical whims and processes and different management models in different locations. It has not been cleaned up in recent times so that the establishment reflects the level of funding that has been made available.

Instead of going down the path of investing in new systems of old-fashioned establishment management, we are looking at managing our processes around expenditure and what is available in salary dollars and focusing on whether they are adequate or need to be redeployed. Because it is not where we are heading, it is not easy to answer the question "What is the exact establishment in a particular location?" The answer could be wrong or meaningless for a variety of reasons. However, as I indicated, if it is an issue of such interest to the Committee we could provide some form of meaningful data. In terms of addressing the priority issues around particular locations, that is an area in which we use management to provide advice about what sorts of initiatives, including additional resources, are necessary to address problems. We do not manage it by sitting looking at computers and reading establishment numbers that we know are rubbish or sitting in Ashfield or the CBD trying to run Bourke by looking at numbers in computers. We deal with real people and real managers to establish redeployment priorities.

CHAIR: You will provide information about current meaningful reporting structures to the Committee?

Mr MOORE: Certainly.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: How many child deaths were there in the past six months?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Every child's death is a tragedy. Year to date, there have been 57, which is a considerable pro rata reduction on last year and the year before. It reflects the new reporting requirements.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Of the assessments that were made of risk of significant harm, how many children received a face-to-face assessment by a caseworker in the past six months?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am very pleased you asked that question because we have put an enormous effort into improving the baseline. As you know, in August 2011 the Ombudsman observed that 24 per cent of children had their cases closed without assessment. We have introduced a number of measures. Of course, the safety assessment, risk assessment [SARA] tool is working much more effectively. That has enabled us to increase the number of face-to-face assessments by 27 per cent since last year. In fact, 25,684 assessments were completed in 2011-12 compared with 20,204 in the previous year. That is almost 30 per cent more children and young people benefiting from improved services.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: How many children in care were restored to their families?

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

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I would like to revisit the further savings strategies document. You say the document has no status or standing within the agency. Presumably whoever wrote it did not simply wake up one day and decide to set down some thoughts on a piece of paper. Who gave the direction to look at savings and to prepare this document?

Ms PRU GOWARD: It was not authored by me so I invite the director general to answer that.

Mr MOORE: I will take on notice the sourcing of precisely how that document came to be commissioned. I absolutely would not expect it to be as you thought it would not be, that is, someone waking up on a whim. The community services agency within the Department of Family and Community Services has been refining and improving ways in which it focuses on financial management because that is a critical part of being able to be an effective organisation. While I have welcomed the steps that it has taken to get its house in order around those matters, as I was indicating to the Committee earlier, the way in which those responsibilities have been executed are ones that are misconceived. The chief executive and I have been working on alternative structures and arrangements—

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: The face of the document states that the Department of Family and Community Services executive asked the Deputy Director General, Corporate Services, to provide a paper. I think you said you only became aware of this document yesterday?

Mr MOORE: That is right.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: On 16 August, Adele Horin wrote an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in which she quotes from this document. Did you or the Minister see that article or have cause to investigate what that document said as at mid August?

Mr MOORE: That is right. As I recall the article to which you refer was about a particular set of issues related to, I think, the core preserved services and what was being portrayed in that article was, indeed, a complete misconception of what was being done around the preserve services and the review that was being undertaken.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: You did not read the document at that time?

Mr MOORE: I did not feel the need to look at that document at that time. I understood from the Adele Horin article that it had presumed it had a much narrower scope than it turned out to be. By about that time the chief executive and I would have been talking about how we needed to reposition senior resources within Community Services and how we needed to move away from addressing the challenges of community services in the same old approach.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Who constitutes the Department of Family and Community Services executive?

Mr MOORE: The executive comprises me, the two deputy directors general and the three chief executives.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Did you request this document to be drafted?

Mr MOORE: No, is the simple answer and the context is that, as I have indicated to you, a number of aspects of that document are misconceived. I certainly do know that the executive of the Department of Family and Community Services has been expecting all of the parts of the department—and remember each of the managers, the chief executives and others who comprise the parts—to have been a party to action on what we need to do to ensure that we have strong financial management.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: To be very clear, you say that the Expenditure Review Committee of Cabinet has not set any savings targets outside the 1.2 per cent? Minister, have you set any savings targets for your agency?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, apart from the 1.2 per cent and the efficiency dividend that has been in place for a number of years.

Mr MOORE: And a few other relatively minor whole-of-public-sector savings requirements, a few savings measures that have been announced. Those are the things that I said we would provide to you on notice so that you have a detailed assessment of just what they were. The executive of the Department of Family and Community Services in no way requested the sorts of documents that you have in front of you.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: How many out-of-home-care contracts have been issued? What dollar value is involved? How many of those organisations are not-for-profit and for-profit?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As at 30 September 2012 we have had 199 children transferred to non-government organisations and there are 38 new contracts, including 18 new providers now being able to provide those services. They are all not-for-profit. This is not a commercial activity and we are welcoming some very old and wonderful household names into the out-of-home care family, such as the Salvation Army and the House with No Steps. It gave us a wonderful opportunity to review the existing contracts for out-of-home care, which was one of the legacies left to us which is one of the reasons why we had this \$1.9 billion hole.

There was an enormous number of old individual carer agreement contracts that were essentially emergency contracts that were paying organisations multiples of the cost of providing care that other organisations were being paid. That was one of the reasons out-of-home-care costs were going up so quickly under the old regime and one of the things we have had to look at as part of getting our financial management

back under control. We now have 38 new contracts. We are very careful about the way we are transferring children. They are all accredited—and we have the Children's Guardian here. The important thing is that they are now going to organisations where those children will be seen regularly by case workers, which we were not able to provide.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Will you advise about after-care services and, in particular, leaving care plans? Will we see an improvement? Is part of their contract to ensure an improved service with leaving care plans?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Of course leaving care plans are very important and it is one of the areas where we really let children down before, which are why we had such large percentages of them going into Juvenile Justice and homelessness. Leaving care contracts are a very important part of well-managed foster care, again an issue we believe will be much better managed by the non-government organisation sector.

Ms WALK: Every child and young person in out-of-home care statutorily should have a leaving care plan from 15 years of age. Unfortunately, as you know, often children who are in Community Services care do not have a leaving care plan. What Community Services has done about that is to introduce a revised standard case plan framework and template—I saw it recently—which assists our case workers to ensure that leaving care is considered the key objective of each and every case plan for a 15-year-old in out-of-home care. The transfer of out-of-home care to our accredited non-government partners has commenced. Non government out-of-home care service providers will have increased responsibility to ensure timely leaving care plans. Ms Boland might like to talk about the standards of leaving care plans. Non-government agencies already have a much better track record unfortunately than Community Services in actually having leaving care plans that are not only plans but also that plans are actually put into action with both the carers and the children and young people.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Have we seen an improvement in the past reporting year?

Ms WALK: In terms of the actual number of leaving care plans?

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: The provision of leaving care plans? Previously it was a very low number of about 18 per cent. Have we seen an improvement? What is the financial contribution to after care?

Ms PRU GOWARD: There have only been 199 transferred so this process is just beginning and I do not think we are in a position this year to let you know if there has been a significant improvement in the leaving care plans outcome for children in foster care. Another year and we should start to see the results.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: In terms of annual reporting about the level of provision of plans?

Ms WALK: I prefer to take that one notice.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I will put it on notice as I did last year to keep tracking it. What is the allocation for the Protecting Aboriginal Children Together program? Are you able to advise if any of this money is going towards Toomelah? What specific actions are being taken to address the situation at Toomelah?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Protecting Aboriginal Children Together [PACT] is a fantastic initiative and I certainly met the PACT team in Moree, which services Toomelah, and I think it is going to make a tremendous difference. I think I might have to take on notice if you want the number of caseworkers in the PACT program.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Yes. I am looking at the overall investment and breakdown of information you have around that, in particular, to Toomelah.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am going to have to take the number of people working in PACT on notice.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Yes, I would rather have the accurate figures. The Staying Home Leaving Violence program is currently operating. What is the current project there and is that an expansion—

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is in the portfolio of Women.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: So you do not want to move to housing now either, I suppose?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Would you like to know a bit more about Toomelah?

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Yes, if you have the information there.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have drafted a short-term interagency action plan, which is intended to ensure that we get better service delivery in Toomelah and Boggabilla. It was obviously in response to the concerns of the community. It sets out a new whole-of-government approach. It looks at the mitigation of significant child safety and environmental health problems accountability for the roles and responsibilities of agencies and collaboration with the local community. I think it is to the dying shame of the former Government, in view of the wonderful work that was being done in terms of sexual assault awareness, that that program was stopped. We are establishing a joint alcohol accord. We have already been able to provide some additional housing-health outcomes in terms of sewerage and wastewater services, and the Toomelah-Boggabilla Local Aboriginal Land Council is now part of the Build and Grow program. So there are a number of initiatives and we are taking it seriously. As I said earlier, the PACT team I meet in Moree is a very experienced group of people.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Is the information around that short-term interagency action plan publicly available? What is being done? Is there a large figure allocated?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I might ask Mr Allen to answer that.

Mr ALLEN: We can certainly take that as a question on notice and provide some details of the range of actions that are being undertaken in Toomelah working with that community and working with the other government departments that are part of the interagency group.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: If I could focus now on another issue that has received a lot of media attention: the Claymore situation. Will you advise the Committee what the Government is doing in relation to that situation? Mr Chris Patterson, MP, has been quoted as saying that a review of social housing is currently taking place and there is no budget until that time. Will you explain where that is up to? When will that housing be addressed in terms of maintenance or any future plans for redesigning the area?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I suggest that Mr Allen will add to my answer if he feels I have not given all the detail that is available. Claymore was a very big legacy problem. Both the State and Commonwealth governments promised redevelopment of an estate for an amount of money that was clearly not possible and they would have known that it was not really deliverable. The tenants were advised that they would be relocated from as early as 2010 without any planning approval and without any allocation of funding. We needed to review that to find the best way forward and, of course, Family and Community Services was part of that review.

We are, as you know, a Government where Housing NSW is responsible for tenant management, the Land and Housing Corporation is responsible for the estate itself as an asset, and the Department of Finance and Services is the responsible ministry—that includes the supply and maintenance budget. Certainly while the redevelopment is under reconsideration, given what we now believe to be the more accurate cost of that redevelopment, we are assessing all requests for responsive maintenance in the same way that we would have considered requests for maintenance anywhere else in the State.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Does that mean that your department is assessing the maintenance requests? There seems to be confusion across the division of the two housing areas as to where the funding is and where the inspection and allocation of the works program is.

Ms PRU GOWARD: As I have said, we represent the tenants. We obviously work very closely with the Land and Housing Corporation, but I will ask Mr Allen to explain that in more detail.

Mr ALLEN: As the Minister has indicated, the Housing division of Family and Community Services is responsible for the tenancies at Claymore. We work very closely with the tenants in that estate and have done for quite some time. There is a Claymore Information Group that our staff meets with on a regular basis. In terms of the physical delivery of maintenance, the physical delivery of those services is the responsibility of the housing and property group within the Department of Finance and Services. Requests for maintenance, however, come through to Housing NSW offices and are dealt with in the usual way—in the same way that

maintenance requests would be across the whole of the State. The vast majority of our tenants though would be calling our Housing Contact Centre, which is a telephone-based service, which allows them to register any concerns they may have about maintenance, and then those concerns and issues are then passed on to the Department of Finance and Services staff for them to undertake those repairs.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Do you have an average time for the processing of a request from you to the department to get the work done? Is there a budget allocation? My understanding is that there are limitations—and I have passed these issues on to the Minister's office—in getting someone to come and check the property and get the work then processed. In terms of the physical maintenance, they are being caught between two different departments. Is that efficient? Are you keeping records of complaints and the time frames for issuing these concerns about maintenance?

Mr ALLEN: The answer to the question is across a couple of different areas. Firstly, we work very closely with our colleagues in the Department of Finance and Services to ensure that we have appropriate delivery arrangements for maintenance and their services right across the State. There are no limitations at Claymore. We do monitor the performance of our maintenance contractors. I say "our" in the wide sense: the maintenance contractors that are now the responsibility of the Department of Finance and Services. Repairs and maintenance are undertaken based on the actual repair and maintenance that is required.

If it is a really urgent matter, such as a sewer choke or the electricity is disconnected, then it is dealt with in a prescribed short time frame. There is a clear framework around the performance of contractors and the delivery of those repairs and maintenance services. They are monitored and registered. When a tenant calls the Housing Contact Centre they are given a reference number. If they call back then the staff can immediately access that information and provide a response to the client. Where there are concerns about contractor performance they are followed up. It is a computer-based system that allows very prompt monitoring and responsive action.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Minister, in Budget Paper No. 3, agency 4, Family and Community Services Cluster, page 4-1, under "Community Support for People with a Disability, their Family and Carers", the budget has been cut by 39 per cent. It was \$1.2 million in 2011-12 and in 2012-13 it has been reduced to \$743 million. That is a 39 per cent reduction or \$479 million. What impact will those cuts have? What areas will be impacted through those cuts?

Ms PRU GOWARD: There will be no impact because that program has been transferred to the Commonwealth, but I will ask Mr Moore to elaborate.

Mr MOORE: The change that you see there in the budget is part of the disability component of the Family and Community Services [FACS] cluster. It relates to the agreement with the Commonwealth of a couple of years ago to have responsibility for community services; for community support—often known as home and community care type programs—to be the financial responsibility of the Commonwealth. For people under 65 the responsibility would remain with the States. From the beginning of the 2012-13 financial year payment for those services, or the bit that is for over-65s, would no longer be sourced from grants given by the Commonwealth to New South Wales but would be made directly by the Commonwealth to the agencies.

The shift has been for money effectively to move back to the Commonwealth, rather than give it to us, and for payment directly from the Commonwealth. From the New South Wales perspective, one of the requirements was that we were participating in the agreement on the basis that there was no diminution in service, no added red tape and so on from the separation of the funding. On that basis, we are expecting that the Commonwealth will continue to provide the funding levels so that the organisation is not disadvantaged, but the reduction that is there is not a cut in any classic sense.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: It is a transfer.

Mr MOORE: It is a transfer of responsibilities.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Are you aware that the Commonwealth is fully meeting those obligations?

Mr MOORE: We are not in a position to judge the Commonwealth at this point. We have not seen any information put in the public arena. We have no reason at this stage. We are not hearing reports from providers

and others who consider themselves to be disadvantaged. The reality is that I do not think the Commonwealth would be in a position to do very much to vary payments at this point in time. It is a massive undertaking for it to take over payments to such a large array of individuals. It is governed under the agreement by a requirement to make no substantive differences in the service delivery system until 2015.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Would the same explanation apply to another item in the budget papers—community development and support—if there is a 50 per cent cut in that area? Does that relate to the Federal Government as well?

Mr MOORE: In that case, no, it does not go back to a change of responsibility of the Commonwealth and State. It comes back within the Family and Community Services cluster, and we are better aligning where funds are placed against programs. When the Family and Community Services cluster first came into being the budget assignment amongst various programs was not as accurate as it could be. What you see in terms of the community development and support program and the decline in budget assigned to that program is due to a decrease because of the transfer of homeless programs to another part of the Family and Community Services cluster, so we are accounting against a different program now, and in 2011-12 the cost of what was then known as the Office of Women's Policy, which was about \$6 million, was assigned to a community services program, when it was inappropriately located there. For this budget we have moved that money across into a central program area. So these changes are not reflective of reductions in activity, just a different way of accounting for the activity. If it assists you, given there are lots of ons and offs, what we would be able to do on notice is give you a table that maps out where these things have moved around so that it is much clearer for you.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You are saying there is no reduction in services.

Mr MOORE: Those transfers were transfers.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: The same may apply to the third item I was seeking a response on, which is child, youth and family prevention and early intervention services. There is a 22 per cent reduction.

Mr MOORE: The most substantive part of that relates to transfers. In that case we moved Brighter Futures caseworker resources from that program to statutory child protection. We reallocated where corporate services costs were being located, which had reflected in the early days of the new structure in the 2011-12 budget that they had been assigned to community services when they should have been assigned to the whole of Family and Community Services, and there is an offset by some of the child protection being better located against this program. But the headline movements, the large movements, in each of those programs is due to reallocation of programs and transfers among programs, not as a result of service reductions.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Another area of concern, which comes under the department's responsibilities, is the child protection investigation and casework services to identify and protect children at risk of significant harm. A number of mothers have come to me in custody disputes where there is joint custody saying they are absolutely convinced that their child is being abused by the father. They seem to be very frustrated as to who they report the abuse to because whenever they raise it with the State police they say, "We do not get involved in family law court matters." How does your department respond to those cries from mothers?

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is not an uncommon problem and I get similar letters, Reverend Nile, and because it is often locked up in Family Court proceedings we have an arrangement with the Family Court called the Magellan Project whereby allegations of child sexual assault are investigated as part of Family Court proceedings. Maree Walk might like to provide some more detail.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Investigated by whom?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We are the child protection authority, so we would do the investigation, but we would do it in conjunction with the Family Court.

Ms WALK: The bottom line is, and we always say it to mothers or anybody, if you think that abuse is taking place, you really do need to report it to Community Services. As people know, we get over 200,000 phone calls to the Community Services help line per year and we go through and try to ascertain the details of those. If families do think that child sexual assault is occurring, we have in New South Wales one of the best systems around—the joint investigation and referral teams—to be able to really examine those cases, and it is

not uncommon at all that those cases we are looking at involve family members. With any questions you have from mothers who are concerned when they have contact with sometimes the non-residential parent or any other family member, we really encourage parents to raise their concerns with the help line so that we can take some action.

Sometimes people do feel somewhat unheard because they feel like they are getting the same old, same old, but we encourage them to continue to raise their concerns. The statutory agency is the agency in New South Wales that should have the response to investigate all allegations. They need to be taken as seriously as any others. If people have complaints about it, we have a complaints line that hears about 10,000 complaints a year in New South Wales. If people feel that the contact that they are making with Community Services is not as effective as they would like they are well within their rights to make more contact with us via our complaints line to elevate their concerns.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Going past the complaints line, which is the telephone, where in the department does somebody physically examine the child to see whether the allegations are justified?

Ms WALK: People phoning in to the centralised help line would have the matter referred to a joint investigation referral team [JIRT]. In New South Wales we have what is called a JRU as well, the Joint Referral Unit, and I have been there. You will see three people sitting around the table—a health worker, a police officer and a Community Services officer. They all have access to their data to be able to really make a call about how to elevate and escalate the concerns that people are raising. We always say to families, "Do not stop raising your concerns if you have them. Raise them with the help line and, if you feel like you are not getting anywhere, certainly raise it with the complaints line." You need to directly speak to the children themselves and that is what investigation is about. In New South Wales we have the joint investigation referral teams, which are throughout New South Wales.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Does that three-person unit establish that there is abuse?

Ms WALK: The three-person unit that we established was really to enable a much quicker response. They decide within two hours about making certain that the joint investigation response team will be able to pick up the matter. If not, they will send it to the community service centre. It is hard to determine the level of complaint but certainly people should initially ring the helpline and Community Services' back office and police will deal with it together. Their best front door to that is the Community Services helpline.

Ms PRU GOWARD: If you have cases where women have come to you and they do not feel they are being listened to, I would be very pleased if you referred them to me.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: That is the bottom line. Maybe it is that police officer who made this comment: "New South Wales State police cannot get involved. It's a Family Law Court matter." They just shut the door on those mothers.

Ms WALK: That is why we repeat that the agency that has a statutory responsibility in New South Wales for hearing abuse complaints is Community Services and we encourage anybody who has concerns about a child, whether in relation to another parent or another family member, to ring us and let us know their concerns.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: A note in the budget papers refers to an allocation of \$6.9 million for protecting children and young people through the Teenage Education Payment. How is that money expended and on which program?

Ms PRU GOWARD: The Teenage Education Payment, as you would be aware, is a payment we introduced. Its purpose is to really encourage keeping young children in foster care at school. I think you would be aware that the attendance at school of foster children in care tends to be lower than the average and we have had to think of ways of supporting foster carers to keep teenagers at school. It began in July this year but we were able to backdate it to 1 January and we have paid it in quarterly instalments of \$1,500. As members know, at the beginning of each school term a child comes home with activities costs and extra courses and school trips and things like that, and they can all be paid—running shoes, sports gear and those sorts of things. They are all part of keeping a child at school. As I said, we did some back payments as well. We received nearly \$6.9 million in this financial year to deliver this initiative, and I am very pleased to see it is really supporting parents. That is the feedback we are getting.

CHAIR: Minister, could you update the Committee on the out-of-home care reforms that your department has put in place to improve services for children and young people in care?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As I think we would all agree, the out-of-home care system that we inherited was not working; you would call it dysfunctional. It was inequitably funded and financially unsustainable. The outcomes for many of the children and young people, I think we would all agree, were very poor. Out-of-home care expenditure grew in the last few years of Labor by about 15 per cent per annum. As I said earlier, part of that arose from the terrible emergency contracts they used as a way of getting around the unions. It went from \$315 million to \$700 million. Every year there were more children coming into care and inconsistencies in how their places were funded. It was not transparent, as we discovered when we began the negotiations. People were shocked to discover how much more than their other organisations were being paid. The variations ranged from \$35,000 per annum for a child in general foster care to \$130,000 for the same level of care. For intensive foster care it ranged from about \$35,000 to almost \$254,000. Ironically, and sadly, Aboriginal agencies tended to be the most underpaid.

For intensive residential care, non-government organisations were being paid anything between \$350,000 and \$942,000 per annum. It was badly regulated and badly managed, and the annual cost ranged from just over \$37,000 to \$53,000. That was the challenge we had for residential care, which of course we like to avoid but, sadly, is necessary for some children. Again, the costs ranged from \$115,000 to \$338,000 per annum. As the Schott report verified, there was a failure to invest in people, systems and capabilities to manage those contracts and also the way that we as a government delivered out-of-home care, because we were the biggest provider of out-of-home care. We need to remind everyone that when we were the major provider of out-of-home care our children were very rarely seen. The ratio was about 1:30 and they were really only seen in an emergency, whereas I think we all agree that best practice is 1:12—some would say 1:8—but obviously we think it should be a fraction of 1:30.

They were individually tailored agreements that were set up to get around the unions because the unions opposed the transfer. They opposed the non-government organisations providing out-of-home care. This was a trick way of being able to say, "No, we are not providing more care to NGOs except in an emergency." Some of these emergencies went on for some years. It did not matter; the taxpayers could pay for dishonesty. We have taken a number of important steps to improve the partnerships with the non-government sector and improve the outcomes for the children, in which the Hon. Jan Barham has indicated her interest, and that is what we should be interested in.

The organisations entered into negotiations with us with a great deal of goodwill. They had asked for this for years, The Wood commission of inquiry recommended it and both sides of politics agreed to it. It was agreed to by the former Labor Government but that huge relationship problem with the unions that has stamped everything that goes wrong in Community Services prevented it from doing it. We were able to do it by July this year and in terms of government activity this was very quick. By July we had 38 agencies, including 18 new providers, being awarded funding to support up to 6,800 children in out-of-home care. The Salvation Army, House with No Steps and Challenge Disability Services were some of the new providers. I note that Labor continues to keep up this characterisation of the transfer to our great charities as some sort of commercial venture. I think Amanda Fazio described it as outsourcing government responsibility, forgetting of course that in many other States and countries foster care has always been provided by the non-government sector. Indeed, we provided some care in the non-government sector. Labor characterised it as some sort of devious commercial activity when in fact it was about improving outcomes and getting away from a system where children were never seen except in a crisis and placements broke down regularly because a family was not seen. This was a very important step forward for these children.

I think we will see better outcomes from foster care. It is very easy to attack foster care and say that children who are in foster care are more likely to end up in jail. One of the reasons for that is if you cannot support children in foster care properly and provide those families with casework assistance and advice and support so that when the child hits the teenage years and hormones start to bounce around and questions of identity become more important, of course the placement is more likely to break down. It is difficult to manage the average teenager, or even your own teenagers sometimes. It is very difficult sometimes to manage foster children that they have not known for as long and who come from very troubled pasts. This will be better for children. We have had to put more money into it, of course—an extra \$11 million this year—but that was absolutely necessary to ensure we got the standard of care that these children deserve. Every one of these agencies was accredited and, as I am forced to remind the public occasionally, we were not accredited to

provide foster care. We were not accredited because we could not meet the standards that we had all agreed to and that Kerry Boland, the Children's Guardian, was responsible for upholding.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Minister, I see that the unions have been up to their old tricks of workplace disruption, walkout and, let us face it, lies as well?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Could you set the record straight and tell us how you are getting on with the job of cutting red tape for caseworkers and how Community Services is improving casework practice?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We certainly inherited a system in which too many children were being reported as being at risk of harm. New South Wales had the highest rate removals in the country and this had an unconscionable and unsustainable impact on Australian society and on New South Wales in particular. It was also riddled with unnecessary procedures and practices that stopped caseworkers from working with children. Justice Woods said that they had a computer system that did not work. Time and again the system was supposed to have been improved but no-one ever got round to improving it. The professionalism and dedication of staff was always challenged by paperwork and time spent in front of the computer, which prevented them from seeing children.

We are determined to remove the red tape and to ensure that caseworkers get on with what they are trained to do—what they came to us to—that is, to work with children and young people. We are now open for business for more hours, which means that caseworkers have more time to work in their communities. We have significantly reduced the time to train caseworkers from 12 months to 16 weeks so that they can get on with the job more quickly. We also are improving the stability and performance of the key information and directory [KiDS] system so that it is faster and more reliable. Financial administration tasks have been reviewed, delegated to administrative staff and not caseworkers where possible. This frees up caseworkers to do what they are trained to do, which is to see and to help children, young people and families.

We also have reduced redundant record-keeping and implemented a strong gate-keeping mechanism to reduce the risk that casework staff are being asked to undertake duplicative or unnecessary record-keeping. We are streamlining casework procedures and reforming practice wherever we can, without the help of the unions. The unions have opposed reform. They have imposed a series of work bans on community services, which is not helping. Those work bans get in the way of our people being able to do their job. It is disgraceful that the unions consistently do this and then talk about these poor vulnerable children, which by their own actions demonstrates their lack of concern. I invite Maree Walk to give you more detail about what we are doing.

Ms WALK: This really goes to the heart of what we, as a statutory agency, are about—reforms to our practice that are essential to strengthen our work with families—our clearer referral pathways. One of the things that delights me about these referrals to our non-government partners is the increase of 300 families in the Brighter Futures program who are being seen by non-government agencies. So 800 additional children every year are getting this service, which is really wonderful. The other part of the work being done in our child protection practice relates to our Strengthening Families Program, which just started in the middle of this year, and which has already seen 499 families. Families at high risk or very high risk are receiving a service from this organisation.

One of our focuses relates to new ways of helping our caseworkers who are working directly with families. We have been trialling a model called Practice First in Bathurst and Mudgee. At the completion of six months there are really positive indicators that the model has led to improved practice and reduced procedural reliance as caseworkers in the two offices in Bathurst and Mudgee have spent significantly more time with families which is what we want them to do as opposed to putting data into computers. We want them in people's homes helping families to reduce the risks to their children and to increase projections. This model draws together an evidence base as to what works in child protection in both the United Kingdom and the United States. We recently put together a document that has come back from the United Kingdom which reviewed it and which said that this work, which is really significant, is being talked about.

Last week I attended a meeting at which people from South Australia were talking to me and saying, "We have heard about what you are doing. We would love to come and have a look at it." This kind of work is also about ensuring good child protection practice for our caseworkers. Some of the initiatives in which we have been engaged will lead to the establishment of an Office of the Senior Practitioner. It is important for our

caseworkers to be able to know that they are led by somebody in a unit that ensures good child protection practice. The newly established Office of the Senior Practitioner has just begun by establishing a practice advisory group to engage caseworkers throughout New South Wales—Aboriginal caseworkers, multicultural caseworkers, front-line caseworkers, right through to our directors in child and family services—in talking about good practice. The office also is focusing on evidence-based child protection work, which is critical for us.

The other part of our work involves engaging with our non-government partner agencies. Justice Wood looked at this area but it would be a mistake to think that child protection resided only in the statutory agency. Child protection is an area of work that is best done when it is seen across the service system from families, communities, the health department and the education department. We are empowering local officers to join the service system and to do much better work. We also have put together a practice framework to get away from procedures that sometimes bedevils caseworkers. They become so concerned about the levels of risk that they are constantly documenting risk and not seeing the strengths of a family.

This practice framework will ensure that we get that right. Once again we are in the vanguard in Australia in that area. New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria are working together to see what each State is doing in the practice framework area. New South Wales is well known for introducing structured decision-making to help our caseworkers assess risk and to guide them in the actions that they need to take. The work we have been doing around structured decision-making has become well known in Australia. Other work that we are doing relates to family preservation and restoration pilots, which is critical if we are to increase safety and ensure that children can stay at home. In transferring out of home care from government to non-government organisations we are not saying that we think out-of-home care is the best place for children to be. Clearly, children yearn to be reared by their families, but it is our role to ensure that families are safe for children. So the family preservation and restoration pilots that we are engaged in are important in assisting us to do that. I could go on but I probably should leave it there.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: On that theme of keeping children and young people safe, can you inform the Committee about early intervention services, particularly for nine-year-olds to 15-year-olds and any new initiatives that are being provided in those services?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think the nine-year-olds to 15-year-olds sometimes get a bit forgotten. They are not as vulnerable as very small children and they are not on the brink of adulthood, as are 17-year-olds. However, it is a critical age group, as are children of all ages. We are committed to investing in much more early intervention for children in that nine-year-old to 15-year-old age group. We have looked at ways of refocusing about \$40 million over four years from Community Services to non-government organisations to provide innovative services for nine-year-olds to 15-year-olds and their families across New South Wales. This is a crucial time in a child's life for physical, social and emotional development and it is a great opportunity for positive intervention to help children to reach their full potential. The services that we are developing as part of this will complement other existing early intervention services for younger children, such as the Strengthening Families program that is now being provided by Community Services and the Brighter Futures program delivered by the non-government sector.

Both of those programs focus on children up to the age of eight. The early intervention services for the nine-year-olds to 15-year-olds will make use of innovation, again from the non-government sector, to improve responses to children and young people at risk of significant harm. The tender process for early intervention services for the nine-year-olds to 15-year-olds started in the first week of October and conclude in the final week of November. Funding of between \$1 million and \$3 million per annum over four years per service will be provided to non-government organisations in five selected sites. The services will be trialled in Metro West, Metro South West, Northern, Western, and Hunter-Central Coast. The aim is to develop those innovative approaches that are needed to address what are often multiple and very complex needs.

The client group for these services are these children aged nine to 15 and their families, and they need to have been the subject of a risk of significant harm report to Community Services but not yet been prioritised to receive a statutory service. Where necessary, there will be flexibility for the services to work with children and young people who are currently not the subject of a risk of significant harm report but are at risk of entering the child protection system.

In the Hunter-Central Coast region the tender seeks specific proposals to implement a service model based on the Wraparound Milwaukee model, which is a way of wrapping a number of services around the child or young person to meet their individual needs, which might involve mental health, disability, alcohol misuse,

school attendance and offending behaviour. The Wraparound model emphasises that services are working together to create a plan for the child or young person, who needs to build on their strengths and the strength of their family and the needs that also connect them to the community.

In the four other locations the service models will draw on the skills and expertise of non-government organisations to design and implement innovative models based on existing practice evidence. Tender applicants will need to have demonstrated that their service model reflects interventions that address these complex issues, interventions that improve outcomes in education, community connectedness, parental role modelling and ways to achieve and sustain the active engagement and participation of children, young people and their families. The applicants also need to demonstrate they can manage the safety and risk associated with it.

An interim evaluation of the initiative is planned for 18 months after the operation, and a main report after three years of the operation of these five. The results will inform whether changes to our general service models are required, whether the trial initiative is extended or whether funds are directed to other initiatives. As I said earlier, a responsible department constantly reviews its programs and looks at ways of enhancing them, removing them, reducing them or adding to them, depending on the outcomes they achieve.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Minister, when I asked you a question about the workplace bans and disruption I was concerned to hear that there is an adverse effect on children. Would you like to elaborate on that aspect, please? I think that is something that is extremely disturbing.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, thank you. At such a critical time when the child protection system in New South Wales absolutely needs to keep on with the job of reform, when we know that we inherited a legacy not just of poor financial management but of children not getting great outcomes, it is very important to be able to persist with reform. As you have suggested, the unions are not in favour of reform. For them, this is just a business model. They are just interested in membership. They are not interested in the capacity of the sector to look after children.

On 1 July this year they imposed 19 work bans—19 work bans—across New South Wales. It has cost us over 2,000 hours of frontline staff in walk-outs in the past few months, and more than 12 walk-outs in CSCs across the State. That is a disgrace. It is a very important job that we do and, as I say, they have ordered work bans such as telling their members to disregard case work procedures that they, as a union, have not approved. Unions can do some things but they are not the experts in case work. That is what the department is for and that is what our experts are for. They will not take part in performance reviews. How can a case worker learn how to improve what they do if they do not take part in performance reviews? It is an essential part of any professional person's life, particularly in large organisations.

Their managers were not to attend briefing sessions on new work practices. How can you do the wonderful things that Maree Walk has just described? Practice first. How can you make the system better if you do not know how we are going to improve the way we work with children? If you do not do these things, if you do not do these reforms, if you do not change practices then you are stuck with having to do unpleasant things. This is a much better way to change the way with children, to unleash that capacity in our case workers, but the Public Service Association, as I said, just continued to oppose it. Members have been directed not to participate in routine and regular complex case reviews—complex case reviews. These involve kids and very high risk families and they are not to participate in case reviews. Where does that get you?

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: What is the rationale, if any, behind that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I suspect they think it means they slow down the work we do so they can run around the State demonstrating or claiming that we are not doing our job, but it is they who are stopping us from doing our job. Despite all of that, we are actually seeing more children—as I said in an earlier question—than we did two years ago, and that is all credit to the staff who have taken up the tools, and they are with the program. The staff want to do better. Imagine what it has been like every year, having to accept publicly the criticism that you have seen so few children. Imagine how they feel. They train at university; they commit to doing this work; they come to do it and they have a union telling them not to do it. This is a great opportunity for them to do better, and we have a union that just stops them whenever it can.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Have you found resentment among staff to some of these practices of the union?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, I think the staff very deeply resent what is happening. I invited the union. I wrote to Steve Turner earlier this year and I said, "We can do the same old, same old—we want to get on with reform and you want to get on with stopping it—or you can join with us and we can work together." He said to me verbally before I wrote that letter, "We will get rid of restrictive work practices." He admitted we had restrictive work practices. I sent the letter—not a reply. Instead, a series of—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Are you verballing Steve?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, I am not. I have witnesses. I know Mr Turner is very keen on re-election to the Public Service Association. I am sure that we have got—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: That is disgraceful.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am sure we have got the member for Auburn on the phone every morning saying, "What do you want me to ask today? What outrageous allegation do you want me to make in Parliament today?" That is what has happened. We have had a series of lies from the union which have been repeated—repeated—by members of the Opposition, such as we are going to cut 900 case workers. We have only 2,200.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Have you spoken to the members?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I speak to my staff—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Did you go out there?

CHAIR: Order! I remind the Opposition that this is now Government questioning time.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: She does not know what she is talking about.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I speak to my staff whenever I can. I would guess I have probably had more staff meetings with Community Services staff than the previous Ministers because I have made it my business to find out what frustrates them, and it is always red tape. It is always things that stop them from doing their job, and to look at what we can do about that. I am very proud of my record of relationships with the staff, and I think they do a fantastic job under onerous circumstances.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are cutting their wages.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Their wages have gone up by 2.5 per cent, which is greater than the rate of—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You have cut them in real terms.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I beg your pardon. The rate of inflation, for those of us who cannot do arithmetic—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Which is you.

Ms PRU GOWARD: The rate of inflation is less than 2 per cent—

CHAIR: Participating members are here under the privilege of the Committee. Please do not interrupt other members' questioning time.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Madam Chair, the Minister was answering.

Ms PRU GOWARD: The rate of inflation is less than 2 per cent, well under 2 per cent, and the wage increase has been 2.5 per cent, which means that, unlike many people in the private sector, our workers have enjoyed another real wage increase. There is no suggestion that they are struggling and are in difficult and parlous financial circumstances. They want to do the job and they do it extremely well. Only a week or so ago a caseworker spent days going around a suburb looking for the extended family of a child who did not know whether he had any family and she found them. I hope the union never finds out about it, because I am sure she would be admonished for trying.

(Short adjournment)

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, in meeting your budget cuts, how much in savings have you made in the past year by withholding contingencies such as respite, funding for psychologists, medical specialists and so on from kinship carers?

Ms PRU GOWARD: My understanding is that we have not changed the contingency payment arrangements.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Many carers of children with very high needs are saying that they are receiving less now in contingencies than they were.

Ms PRU GOWARD: A new standardised tool has been provided to assess the level of need of each child. Some children have been assessed as being in greater need, which means that the foster carer is provided with more financial support, and others have been assessed at a lower level of need.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I know you are aware of this because at that much-publicised morning tea at your home the carers raised this issue with you. You told them that if they were not going to receive those contingencies that they should tell the non-government organisations that they will return their kids.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I do not know that I said that.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: A number of people who attended the morning tea have contacted the shadow Minister and confirmed that that is what was said. You know that they are getting less in contingencies.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I repeat my earlier statement that there are other children and foster carers who are receiving more.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: How much has been saved?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I do not think it was a savings measure; it was about standardising assessment of a child's level of need.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Funding for Community Services in the 2010-11 budget was \$1.67 billion and the proposed expenditure for 2012-13 is \$1.4 billion. That is a significant reduction in anyone's language, is it not?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As I said earlier, that is because of the transfer of the homelessness program to Housing NSW.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Do you say that that accounts for all of that difference?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have had to spend more money in some areas, for example, for the Teenage Education Payment and for the transfer of out-of-home care. As I said, the homelessness program has also been transferred to Housing NSW.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Housing NSW is still in your cluster.

Ms PRU GOWARD: This is within Community Services. The Department of Family and Community Services is the cluster. As the director general said earlier, this reflects a reassignment of responsibilities across the divisions.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I am happy for you to take this question on notice. I would like the figures for all the things that you say have been transferred so that I can run through the numbers myself. The efficiency dividends savings that you conceded earlier were being made are still in your cluster. The further savings strategy document quantifies them across the forward estimates for Community Services as \$683 million. Is that figure correct? If it is not, what is the correct figure for the efficiency dividend savings across the forward estimates, including for the current financial year?

Mr HUNTER: The efficiency dividend savings measure is about \$400 million.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Across the forward estimates?

Mr HUNTER: For Family and Community Services.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Can I have that broken down by year? I am happy to have that question taken on notice.

Mr HUNTER: Yes.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Is it correct that Wilcannia, Bourke and Brewarrina were to get new safe houses under the Orana Far West Women's Safe Houses Project?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: When will the Brewarrina safe house be completed and operational?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As you might be aware, there have been some difficulties in beginning that work. I will ask Mr Allen, who is head of Housing NSW, to provide a more detailed answer.

Mr ALLEN: We have been in the process of constructing safe houses in those three locations. The Wilcannia safe house has been completed and the Bourke safe house is nearing completion. There have been considerable difficulties in delivering the safe house at Brewarrina. A number of sites have been identified.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I am interested in the timing.

Mr ALLEN: A number of different views have been expressed in the community about the most appropriate location.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: To cut to the chase, last year I asked about the funding for this project and I sought assurances that the director position would be funded until the safe houses were operational. That question was taken on notice and the response stated that all safe houses are operational. From what you and the Minister have said, the safe houses at Bourke and Brewarrina are not operational. Why was the Committee misled in that answer?

Mr ALLEN: You have me at a disadvantage. I do not recall the answer that was provided to that question on notice. I am happy to take that further. However, the Brewarrina safe house is the subject of further consultation with the Brewarrina community.

CHAIR: I ask the Hon. Adam Searle to table that document. It will be forwarded to you, Mr Allen.

Document tabled.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I would like an explanation of the decrease in funding to the Aboriginal Housing Office from \$122.9 million in 2011-12 to \$110.7 million in 2012-13.

Mr ALLEN: The funding for the Aboriginal Housing Office is substantially affected by the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing. The funding for that State-Federal partnership differs across the years of the forward estimates. That would account substantially for the difference in the funding arrangements. I am happy to take that as a question on notice.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What is the homelessness partnership funding balance for the 2011-12 financial year—is there a carryover? If so, where will it be spent?

Mr ALLEN: The National Partnership Agreement on homelessness is a four-year funding agreement between the State and the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth is contributing \$101 million over four years and New South Wales is over-matching that with a contribution of \$241 million. We are now in the last year of the funding agreement with the Commonwealth. We are in detailed negotiations with the Commonwealth as we do

see it as essential that further Commonwealth funding is provided for homelessness. I will come back to you in relation to the balance of the funding for this financial year.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I refer to Claymore and the comments by the member for Camden, Chris Patterson, in the media who said he was not commenting and nothing was being done until the review of social housing was finalised.

Ms PRU GOWARD: That question should be better addressed to the Minister for Finance and Services, Mr Greg Pearce, who is responsible for the financial arrangements concerning Claymore. It was the view of his department that the estimated cost of redeveloping the estate was unrealistically low and it had to be reviewed. When it was clear that we did not have a lazy half a billion dollars, we needed to work out what we could do to ensure that estate was restored to its previous capacity.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I was concerned about your earlier report about work bans. Can you give examples of children at risk because of the work bans put on by the Public Service Association which restrict caseworkers?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Unlike the Public Service Association and the Opposition which like to link the safety of children with work practices, I do not. Working with children at risk is a very challenging task and I do not think it is helpful to blame work bans or industrial arrangements for endangering children's lives, as they have done. I thought its list of allegations about how this was risking the lives of kids and the Wollongong accusations about a child dying were reprehensible. I know that Wollongong office staff were very distressed. They had no intention of having that link made but, unfortunately, it is repeatedly made by the union and the Opposition.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Have work bans put children at risk?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I do not think it is a fruitful topic but it certainly makes the job harder, and easier not to do the reforms. If the unions do not want reforms the problem is that the other ways of doing it, as we have prosecuted quite thoroughly this afternoon, are all unpleasant. If the unions actually cared about children, they would accept that it is far better to reform the way we work with children than it is to cut the helpline or something else. They are very unpleasant ways to achieve a lesser outcome.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I note a reference in the budget papers to the Keep Them Safe program which will continue in 2012-13. Will you outline the operation of that program?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Keep Them Safe was an outcome of the Wood royal commission. The concept of Keep Them Safe is that all parts of government, not just Community Services, should be concerned with keeping children safe. A large part of the Keep Them Safe money, which was about three-quarters of a billion dollars, went to Community Services but a significant proportion also went to the departments of Education and Health because it was important to start to build the capacity of other parts of the government welfare system to look after these children. There have been no cuts this year. It is all about improvements to prevention and early intervention, which is where Health and Education can do so much, and increasing our investment in child protection services. I take this opportunity to assure Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile and the committee that since we have embarked on the reform of the out-of-home-care system not a single child has been returned to Community Services. I think that speaks for itself. Foster carers, agencies and the children are happy where they are.

CHAIR: Will you outline what the O'Farrell-Stoner Government has done to improve services for the homeless in New South Wales?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Homelessness is a critical issue and I think we should all agree that it is a bipartisan issue. In a country as wealthy as ours it is very disappointing that there should be homelessness. We have set ourselves a number of goals in the State plan NSW 2021 but by 2013 we committed to reducing homelessness by 7 per cent, rough sleeping by 25 per cent and the number of Aboriginal people who are homeless by one-third. We also want to reduce the occurrence of repeat homelessness. It is very challenging. It will require ongoing investment from the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments to achieve lasting results. As the committee is aware, the Commonwealth Government has yet to commit to another partnership, so we really do not know if any more money will come from the Commonwealth.

I think we have to accept that the causes of homelessness are not just a bed disappearing. There are very difficult issues surrounding homelessness, such as, drug and alcohol dependence, mental illness, the movement out of correctional facilities with nowhere to go, often children leaving foster care and often young people in difficult family circumstances who leave home. The revised census figures from 2006 reveal that there are more than 22,000 homeless people in New South Wales. That very high figure does not capture the people who are at risk of homelessness, the couch surfers and the people who stay with their daughter for six weeks and then move. Next month when the 2011 Census figures come out we will see whether we have been able to make any inroads with some of the new programs that we have begun which, as I said, all address the underlying causes of homelessness. Homelessness, in a sense, is a symptom of other problems and the specialist homelessness sector is a key to improving how we work with homeless people.

We have committed to a two-year \$5.3 million reform program which we have called Going Home, Staying Home which will improve the capacity of the specialist homelessness services sector to deliver better outcomes for people. We want to shift from the need for crisis services, like accommodation in a shelter, to preventive services. Living in a shelter is no outcome for anybody, particularly a woman with small children, and we need to do much better at preventing homelessness. We need a consistent approach to client intake, referral and assessment and we need to be able to better match people with the services that they need. We need to improve the structure, quality and contracting of the services and ensure that the homelessness sector has a skilled and stable workforce. They are wonderful people who work very hard but they can always do with greater support and upskilling. We will always welcome innovative approaches that are effective. This is work that will never be done unless we encourage innovation as a way to find those breakthrough ideas that enable us to reduce the numbers and make peoples' lives better.

Mr ALLEN: The Minister announced the Going Home, Staying Home reforms in July last year and at that announcement also launched a consultation paper that set out the case for change. Since that announcement was made a great deal of work, activity and progress on setting the direction and framework for the reform have been undertaken. We held a series of regional forums right across the State during July and August to consult on the reform directions based on that consultation paper. We also sought written submissions and received a total of 75 written submissions. A consultation summary report is currently being finalised and will be made available on the website of the Housing NSW division in coming weeks.

We have also successfully established formal governance arrangements to provide the essential guidance and input from a range of sectors stakeholders. We have held a leadership assembly across two days in September and October, where the elements of the reform were further developed with a leadership group. That leadership group included senior departmental officials but also, importantly, members of our Sector Reference Group. The Sector Reference Group is made up of peak organisations such as the Women's Refuge Movement, Homelessness NSW and Shelter NSW. We also included in that leadership group members of our panel of experts. They consist of notable people such as Professor Eileen Baldry, a renowned homelessness researcher from the University of New South Wales.

A draft road map for the reform has been provided to that leadership group in recent days to enable sector feedback prior to further consideration of the roadmap for the reform by the Minister and the Government. We hope to see that released shortly. We think the final roadmap should be available in November. It will outline the principles and the focus of reform work for the specialist homelessness services reform in New South Wales and the specific design elements will be developed during the reform period. It has been a really successful process of working together between our department and agency and our various stakeholder partners in the homelessness sector. We look forward to continuing that positive relationship and the final production of the reform report.

CHAIR: We will now move to the examination of the portfolio of Women. The Opposition members will commence questions. Those officials who wish to leave may do so.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, can you rule out cutting funding to the Liverpool Women's Resource Centre?

Ms PRU GOWARD: There is a review of grants going on at the moment because we need to make absolutely sure that we use every dollar wisely. As you might recall, these grants have been going on for some years—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: This particular group was on a three-year agreement and they only have funding until December. Will you rule out cutting their funding?

Ms PRU GOWARD: If the funding is until December they will receive funding to December.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, after December.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is part of that review.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So you will not rule out cutting funding?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have to make sure that we get absolute value for money. There are a number of programs and a number of organisations delivering services for women around New South Wales.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: But you are not providing clarity to this organisation, to the community it serves or to the workers at the centre who provide the service to the community.

Ms PRU GOWARD: If the review is not completed in a timely way, as has been the practice in the past, the funding will continue until the review is completed.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So you are guaranteeing that they will get funding after December?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am guaranteeing that they will be funded until December and if the review is not completed then they will continue to receive funding until the review is completed and we are clear about what services we need to fund.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Can you rule out cutting funding to the Welfare Rights Service?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think you would say I would give the same answer.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Can you rule out cutting funding to the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think I would give the same answer.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Why will you not commit funding to the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service?

Ms PRU GOWARD: For the same reason I will not commit funding after December to any of them because the job of a government is to ensure that there is value for money.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: When will they know?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I might ask Maura Boland to give you a bit more detail.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Sorry, this is cutting into my time.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is just that I thought we were talking about the portfolio for Women. These services are all funded—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No. These services may be funded by Family and Community Services—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: —but women rely on these services.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, that is true.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: That is right. I would like to know if they will secure funding.

Ms PRU GOWARD: You could have asked this in the Community Services section.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, but this affects women.

Ms PRU GOWARD: This was when we had the staff here that you could have asked.

CHAIR: Order! There is a portfolio division for a reason.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Sure. You are not providing any certainty, thank you. Why has the \$2.9 million Domestic and Family Violence Grants Program been under review for more than 12 months?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That review has been a very important one because it is a large amount of money for the office of Women NSW. We have a new approach to those domestic and family violence grants. The Government is going to invest \$9.8 million over three years. We are determined to improve services and drive reform in this area.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Sorry to interrupt you, but last year the \$2.9 million Domestic and Family Violence Grants Program was frozen. The community organisations were not funded last year and there has been a freeze for this year. Many organisations have spoken to me. They are very concerned that they have not been getting any information from your office about where this program is up to.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Let us hope they read today's online news services, because I announced the new domestic violence program today.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are going to fund—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Some \$9.8 million over three years.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: This includes the Domestic and Family Violence Grants Program?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is right.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: What about the period—

Ms PRU GOWARD: May I tell you about it? Do you want to know about it?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, I want to know—

Ms PRU GOWARD: You do not want to know about it? Oh my goodness, I thought this was about women.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Do not be sarcastic with me.

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, I think it is about time—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: This is very important—

Ms PRU GOWARD: And that is why I want to tell you.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: There are women's organisations that have missed out on funding last year and this year. You have frozen funding and they and the community have missed out.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Now we have a \$9.8 million program over three years, with four funding streams, and that we believe will produce much better outcomes across the community. It will build better evidence. It will build a more capable sector. We have a focus now on changing men's behaviour, which is a new stream in this work—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Sorry, will you guarantee that out of this \$9.8 million that you have not cut any funding to the existing pool of funds in relation to domestic and family violence?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have boosted it.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: By how much?

Ms PRU GOWARD: By about \$1.9 million—sorry, \$1.1 million.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: How much?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have boosted it by \$1.1 million.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: What about the community organisations that missed out on the \$2.9 million because it was frozen last year and this year? They missed out on funding.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And they can now apply under the new program for money.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: All that time they have missed out. So you did cut the program.

Ms PRU GOWARD: When we did that review—and I think you would agree that \$2.9 million is a lot of money, it was important to do the review—we found that there were a lot of problems with the existing allocation of money. There was a lack of strategic direction. There was limited information on whether they produced outcomes that were of any benefit—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Thank you, you have answered my question. I understand that KPMG held a public meeting in Dubbo to consult with stakeholders in western New South Wales. Can you advise when that meeting was held?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We can, and if we can just go through the papers here we can get you the date; do you know the date?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Was the meeting open to the public?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We will just get you those details. Would you like us to take it on notice to save time?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Yes, I will give you a number of questions: Was the meeting was open to the public? How many members of the public attended? How many government agency staff attended?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: In your capacity as Minister for Women, I know that you have had an interest in the outcome of the social and community services [SACS] equal pay case because clearly women will be the beneficiaries. Now that the Federal Government has made its commitment, can you advise the Committee what the allocation from the State Government will be to meet that outcome? I understand that the first payments from that equal pay case will be from 1 December this year.

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is correct and the Commonwealth, in typical style, gave us last-minute advice on what they would be contributing.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You have known about this for 19 months.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And we have not been able to conduct negotiations with them because they have refused to negotiate.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, you have refused to make a commitment.

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, no, thank you.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: What is your share?

Ms PRU GOWARD: The Commonwealth's offer is derisory—it is considerably lower than New South Wales Treasury had expected—and for a Prime Minister who thinks she champions women it was a pretty poor offer. We have a Prime Minister who talks big about gender equality and does not find the money to ensure—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: What about your Government?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As you know, we are in parlous economic circumstances, but we will nevertheless continue to negotiate with the Commonwealth Government to ensure that the funding is provided because we do want to pay our fair share and we do recognise the importance of this.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You must have some idea of what the amount is, though, given that you have just suggested that the Commonwealth amount—

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is a matter for the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You have sought no advice from your department about what that contribution would be in terms of your budget, given the fact—

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have obviously worked with Treasury on this.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: So what sort of amount are we talking about? What submission have you made to Treasury?

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is something I think that the Treasurer has indicated we are still working on and that decision—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: We are literally only a few weeks away from making the payment.

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is right and, thanks to the Prime Minister, we are now left trying to do this at the last minute, and her contribution is pitiful. I will ask Mr Moore to give you more details on the negotiations.

Mr MOORE: We in New South Wales are working in a coordinated way through the New South Wales Treasury, which now has the lead on industrial relations matters across the whole of the public and public sectors, and we have certainly been advising them what our views are on what would be the cost implications within New South Wales and the various parts of the programs that we run. The issue goes beyond simply the programs that we run because we also have non-government organisations who are undertaking work that is related to not just our programs and our funding but also Commonwealth funding, and also funding out of their own operating and gathered resources. We really have not been able to get satisfactory progress with the Commonwealth, to engage to work out what it is that they are prepared to put on the table. The Minister said we received that—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You have that now, but surely you have been working on some figures yourself. You know what your budget is. Surely you know what your commitment is or what amount we are talking about in terms of those employed under the social and community services award. That is not a hard figure to come up with.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We know that, and we will announce it when we are ready to.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: When?

Ms PRU GOWARD: The Commonwealth cancelled the meeting on 20 September. Here we are with 1 December and they cancel a meeting with us on 20 September, and you are asking us to defend them.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Stop blaming.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You have some responsibility as well, for goodness' sake.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is extremely difficult—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are the Minister.

CHAIR: You asked the Minister a question; let the Minister answer.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is extremely difficult to negotiate with a Government—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You absolve yourself from responsibility.

CHAIR: You asked the question; let the Minister answer.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: This is your budget; it is not the Federal Government's budget. Surely you have some figures—you must have an idea of what it is going to cost.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And we are sharing those with the Commonwealth Government. Let me give you two examples. Apart from the fact that they cancelled the meeting on 20 September, which has reduced our time to make the right calculations and work out how we can do it, they actually receive more in additional tax revenue than they at this stage are paying—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, thank you very much; I only have a very short period of time. You have stated that economic and financial security for women is your key priority. Women make up 60 per cent of the New South Wales public service.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Sixty-four.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Women make up 87 per cent of part-time employees in the public service. Your Government has applied to the Industrial Relations Commission to make a new award and the O'Farrell Government's application calls for abolishing family leave, leave to care for a family member, domestic violence leave clauses, changes to parental leave—this affects women with kinship arrangements and long-term foster carers—the 17.5 per cent annual leave loading and remote area leave allowances. Do you accept that abolishing these conditions will adversely affect women in the public service?

Ms PRU GOWARD: They have not been abolished. There were a number of conditions that you listed that we have not abolished.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, there is an award currently—a live proposal in the Industrial Relations Commission—and your Government has proposed it. The previous Minister for Industrial Relations put out in the media that he wants to abolish 17.5 per cent leave loading and family and community leave. Can you advise, if these conditions are abolished, will that have an adverse impact on women?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As I understand it, many of the conditions you have identified have not been abolished, but some of them have been proposed as tradeoffs if they want more than 2.5 per cent in wage increases.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Explain, if those conditions are traded off, how—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Because women might want to trade them off. There might be women who would rather—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Trade off family leave?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, and indeed they might want the additional money instead of the family leave because they might have a partner at home who looks after the children.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So you support that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, I think the whole point is that you need to give people, which I know is anathema to the Labor Party—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, it is not.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is. You need to give people the chance to negotiate the conditions that suit them.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: But these are conditions that have been put there because they help women in the workforce.

Ms PRU GOWARD: There are some women in the workforce who might see that differently.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: This is why these conditions are important for women in the workforce.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think you will find that there are women in the workforce who would want to trade those conditions off—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am glad that you are putting all of that on the record, Minister. Good on you.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Let me finish. There will be others who would want to keep them.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It was the Labor Party that made \$152,000 available to local councils for International Women's Day grants. You cut that program to \$100,000. There were 125 councils that applied and only 100 councils received funding. Can you tell me why councils like Hurstville, Rockdale and Bankstown, with a high number of women from a non-English speaking background, missed out on these grants?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We did not cut the program, as you very well know.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Yes, you did.

Ms PRU GOWARD: No.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You did.

CHAIR: You asked a question; let the Minister answer.

Ms PRU GOWARD: The budgeted amount was \$100,000, as indeed it had been the year before.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, it was not. It was \$152,000.

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, no, you overran the spending.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It was \$152,000.

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, it was not budgeted for.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: The previous year Hurstville-Rockdale received funding. This year it did not receive funding. You cut funding.

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, we did not.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You did.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We just stuck to the budget.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I will tell you which other women—

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Point of order: The point of this hearing is to ask questions of the Minister, not make statements.

CHAIR: Hear, hear!

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You cut the International Women's Day Program and places such as Bogan shire are remote and rural communities—

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is right, and where do you think I would have got the money from?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Rural and remote communities had received funding.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Where was the money going to come from—domestic violence programs? Is that what you are suggesting? I see. We are going to cut domestic violence.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Your job is to advocate for women in the bush.

CHAIR: There should be no statements. Ask questions and let the Minister answer. You are wasting your time.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Thank you very much for that, but my concern is about women in rural and remote communities that have limited access to services in health and in education. These women missed out on these grants. Women in Bogan shire, women in Brewarrina, women in Broken Hill, women in Cabonne, women in the Hunter, women in Cessnock, Maitland, Port Stephens and Singleton. These women missed out on this grant. These are important grants.

CHAIR: What is the question?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I want to know whether the Minister cares about women in remote and rural communities.

CHAIR: Now you can stop and let the Minister answer.

Ms PRU GOWARD: There was \$100,000, which was exactly the same amount as the year before under the Labor Government. When the first 100 applications were received the program was closed, as it should have been, because my choice—which is clearly not a choice that you have had to consider—was to take money away from other programs in the portfolio of Women.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: How come 15 remote and rural communities where the women—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Because they did not apply.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, they did apply.

Ms PRU GOWARD: They did not apply before others received their funding.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Is that your criterion?

CHAIR: Order! I remind the Hon. Sophie Cotsis that she is here as a participating member at the discretion of the Committee. When you ask a question stop and let the Minister answer. There will be no statements.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am here to ask questions.

CHAIR: You are here because we have allowed you to be here. You are a participating member and we have allowed you to become a full member. We have allowed you that courtesy and we ask you for courtesy. Ask the Minister a respectful question and let her answer.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: These remote and rural communities are disadvantaged. These are low socioeconomic and disadvantaged women. They received funding in 2010-11 and they did not this year.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Their councils were all advised that the program was \$100,000 and that the first 100 applications would be the ones that were funded.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: That does not satisfy the need of these communities.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: How many Staying Home Leaving Violence programs are currently operating in New South Wales to assist women and children experiencing domestic and family violence to stay in their homes?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have expanded the Staying Home Leaving Violence program considerably. Obviously we think it is desirable that the victims of domestic violence and their children should be able to remain in their own homes so that the children's lives remain stable. We have expanded the program to 23 locations. They include Bega—which of course was the first—Cessnock, Lake Macquarie, Penrith, Wollongong, Wyong, Dubbo, Tamworth and Walgett. The budget was \$3.65 million and each project is funded to provide case management services to 30 women a year. In 2011-12 a total of 655 clients received a service.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: How many centres do you anticipate being in operation by 2013?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I do not think we have any plans at this stage to expand the program but we certainly want to maintain the services we have.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Can you make that list available?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Is there a Lismore service?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, there is not one at Lismore.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I will put that on notice. Can you advise on what is happening with the Start Safely program?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Start Safely is a program that enables women to receive support when they go into accommodation after they have left a violent relationship. It is short- to medium-term financial assistance. It can be paid for up to 24 months depending on the family's circumstances, but it is not intended for people with long-term needs. It is intended to enable women, or male victims for that matter, to receive medium-term support. In the 2011-12 year we assisted 717 clients and spent \$2.7 million. We thought it better to expand it from 12 to 24 months because for some women particularly the trauma has meant that 12 months is not long enough.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I asked some questions last year about this program and there was confusion about the amount listed in a press release and the amount shown in the budget. I think the budget figure last year was \$4 million. Is the figure of \$2.7 million for 2012-13? What was the figure for last year and can you advise how it was delivered, or what was delivered?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We will take that on notice because there still seems to be some confusion.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Can you provide some additional information about the domestic violence grants? To whom will they be available and when will they be available? What do you expect in terms of services and how much money is available?

Ms PRU GOWARD: You will probably recall that the Auditor-General made some comments about the disorganised and inadequate way that domestic violence services have been delivered in New South Wales.

We have borne that in mind and it drove the review. We have four funding streams. One is for evidence collection. We need better evidence on what works and what does not work and the most effective responses, particularly when it comes to early intervention. The second funding stream will be building a capable sector through the supporting and resourcing of front-line workers and promoting practice innovation where it is needed.

The third funding stream will address men's behaviour change to stop violence. We recognise that early intervention requires a focus on men's behaviour. They have to be able to step up and take responsibility for their behaviour and for the changes they need to make. Many of them will say that nobody has ever asked them whether they would like to change and how they could change. We hope that will be of some benefit. There are also prevention partnerships where we want to invest in exemplar projects that demonstrate effective collaborative approaches in prevention and early intervention.

It is very much early intervention and prevention focused. We will have local domestic violence committees that will be funded through the prevention partnerships stream. The application process for the local domestic violence committees is now open and it will be phased in, but it will give the sector time to understand our new approach to domestic and family violence grants and to be prepared to apply for funding within the new framework. We must begin to insist on asking, "What are you achieving? Where can we do better? What works?" It is very frustrating not to know what works but to just fund a program because we have always funded it. It is part of our long-term and strategic approach to domestic violence, which will be articulated in the new framework that we expect to release early next year. This framework provides a whole-of-government approach across the full spectrum of interventions and it will include a robust prevention plan. We all have to accept that we have been doing this for 40 years and the numbers of complaints to, for example, the domestic violence lines do not change. We need to start asking some hard questions about what we can do better.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: On that point about prevention, are you looking at continuing the model of the interagency group formula? Does that operate similarly in metropolitan areas to the way it does in the regions? In the regions they are very much focused on interagency groups and I am hoping that is how it will continue so that there is collaboration.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Interagency work and collaboration is obviously important as it is in child protection.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Will you be funding any work to look at the causes of this violence?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We will be funding some research.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Alcohol keeps coming up in every piece of research as a major cause of violence, particularly domestic violence.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is very strongly related; that is true.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Are you able to advise us about the non-traditional work roles for women and what the success of that has been?

Ms PRU GOWARD: This is new work for us. We feel very strongly that the gender pay gap needs to be better addressed. The gender pay gap in New South Wales is slightly less than the national average and certainly less than a State like Western Australia where it is driven by the resources boom and the amazing money that can be paid to tradespeople, mostly tradesmen in the mining sector and Queensland would reflect a similar experience. We need to do better with closing that gap. It is our view that the best way to do that is to give women more opportunities to enter non-traditional occupations such as becoming electricians.

There are more mechanics than electricians, which always amazes me: 0.8 per cent of mechanics are females, 1.9 per cent are electricians. There are very few painters and decorators, yet most women have painted a house in their lifetime. There is a range of professions and trades where I think we can improve the representation of women, and we are doing that, partnering with local government, with industry, and with not for profits, as well as across Government, and we have sponsored Supporting and Linking Tradeswomen, which has a Try-a-Trade Trailer, which goes to schools and encourages women.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Ask her about cuts in TAFE. There will not be any courses.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Minister, moving into a different area altogether, given the appalling levels of physical and psychological violence and abuse experienced by women involved in prostitution, what programs exist in your department to assist women to leave prostitution and also brothels? If so, how much funding is allocated to these programs?

Ms PRU GOWARD: This is a question I think is better addressed to the Attorney General because prostitution is a matter for the law and we have, in the past, been supportive of prostitution initiatives. I have certainly assisted in funding prostitution initiatives for the prevention of prostitution and protection of young women in certain areas in New South Wales, but I think this is not something we have invested in heavily.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: There is no program or funding then?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think from time to time there have been one-off grants and we have certainly invested money in Newcastle, but, no, we have not.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: The Attorney General is only concerned with the legal issues, whereas your department is obviously concerned about women who are suffering and need assistance. Do you think it is an area you might look at? I know you are relatively new and other departments obviously have not given this a focus. Would you consider looking into that in the future?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think it is probably reasonable to say that there are women who engage in prostitution because they do not feel they have any options for earning the sort of money that they need to support an addiction or another aspect of their life, and, yes, they do need assistance in being able to overcome the addiction that might drive the prostitution, and that is probably something we can work collaboratively with Health on. I think your advice and your question is sound. Thank you.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: The West Australian Government has established halfway houses for prostitutes so they can come out of the industry and move into another location and have emotional and financial support.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is a big challenge for a single women's unit to take on, but, again, I note your observations and it is something that would have to be done across Government.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: We now have another very serious problem that has grown in New South Wales. A recent five-year study, compiled with the help of the University of Sydney, found that Government services available to trafficked women, mostly young Asian women, was, "Sparse, uncoordinated and poorly funded". This is an area now where there is a large number of young women involved in prostitution and, according to Associate Professor Julie Hepworth, who said:

Many have been forced or tricked into being trafficked in the sex industry from a young age and have no knowledge of anything else.

Are there any measures currently being considered to deal with this social problem in New South Wales?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As I understand it, it is an international as well as a national problem. Girls can be trafficked into prostitution in Asia, then trafficked again to another country in Asia and then trafficked to Australia. It is a very complex matter. I know the Federal Government, in the past, as become very involved in people trafficking issues, and we have a very strong view in Australia that trafficking is not desirable, and that is why we have close cooperation with the Department of Immigration, with the Federal Police, with intelligence agencies, and with the NSW Police Force. As you say, it is a very big challenge, because so much of it is underground, but it is something I understand that we do in collaboration with the Commonwealth Government.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I know the Commonwealth Government uses Immigration officials to arrest women who have been trafficked, but most of that seems to be more do with whether they have a visa or passport. No-one is actually looking at whether they are being abused or forced into the activity. I thought that would be something your department, with its priority for women's issues, should look into.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Trafficking is difficult because it relies on very good police work, and it relies on a very strong collaborative approach with the Federal Government's intelligence agencies. My understanding is that the NSW Police Force takes trafficking seriously and work with their Federal counterparts. It is difficult

to see what more my policy unit could contribute, given that there has been enormous debate and discussion about trafficking and anti-trafficking measures. In a previous life I was involved in anti-trafficking measures and establishing a national forum for it, and for ensuring that the Federal Police and intelligence agencies were alert to it. At one stage there was a people trafficking ambassador/diplomat. It is difficult to manage, and I am confident that Mike Gallacher and the police have been as active in this as they can be.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: It seems as if this problem is focussed more on Sydney than on any of the other States. The Deputy Director of the Women's Rights Support Division of the Korean Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, Myung Sook Chae, recently stated:

Legal and decriminalised prostitution in Australia was a main cause of the trafficking of Korean women into the sex industry in Australia. The Korean Government estimates there are between 4,000 to 5,000 Korean women who have been trafficked into the sex industry in Australia.

Given that a number of national and international observers can identify New South Wales prostitution laws as worsening sex trafficking, what steps is the New South Wales Government taking to liaise with Korea and other foreign countries to stem the flow of sex trafficking victims into New South Wales?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Again, that is a question for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and the Attorney General. It would need to be a matter for a ministerial council because it is obviously at a level where you need to have an international negotiation between Korea and Australia. I do not think it would be appropriate for New South Wales to go to the Korean Government bilaterally. But I take your point, and I find those numbers extraordinary. If the Korean Government believes there are 4,000 to 5,000 women in Australia who have been trafficked, it would be very useful if we were provided with more information. It is certainly something I would encourage to be taken up—I will take it up and it would be nice if you did too—with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You made the point in your reply that you wished we had more information. That is the whole point. Someone has to talk to the Korean Government to get that information.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I do not think that is occurring.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It needs to be directed to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. However, as Minister for Women, I am happy to raise that issue with him. However, he would have to raise it at the ministerial council level with his State and Federal counterparts.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: RU486 has raised its head again. I know it is a health issue, but it also obviously affects women. I am not aware of any men using it. Are you aware of a United States Food and Drug Administration report that states that RU486 has caused the deaths of 14 women, hospitalised 612, of whom 399 experienced enough blood loss to require transfusion, 256 experienced infections and 48 experienced severe infections. Given that this drug has harmful effects will you liaise with the Minister for Health about this drug?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am happy to take that on board. Childbirth and childbearing are physically risky.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Childbirth is a natural thing; it is not an illness. RU486 does affect women's health.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: I return to the theme of improving opportunities for women across the State. Would you care to expand on what the Government is doing to that end?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Thank you for that question. The Government has been working hard to deliver results since March last year. We have published the first edition of "Women in NSW", which will be an annual report on the status of women in this State. I see that as an election commitment delivered. It has already been cited by a number of agencies, so it is obviously seen to contain robust information. Some of that information has been made available for the first time. The Government has also established the new Women of the Year Awards, which are designed to encourage the public to recognise the achievements of women in all our communities. The awards were celebrated at a tremendous event held in Parliament House. It was preceded by

some terrific publicity and discussion in the press about the achievements of women. There was great engagement in communities as they decided who should be nominated.

The Government has also expanded the Staying Home Leaving Violence program to an additional five sites—honouring another election commitment—and we now have 23 sites. We are improving opportunities for women by increasing the proportion of women working in non-traditional trades. We are also improving services and lives by developing a whole-of-government domestic and family violence framework. We must support and increase women's economic opportunities and security in this State. The Government has a number of goals with regard to women and Women NSW is leading cross-government policy development to achieve those goals.

We must increase the representation of women in better paying non-traditional roles, and particularly women from lower socio-economic groups who perhaps never imagine going to university. Their lives are probably not much different from the lives of their mothers and grandmothers. We must give those girls more opportunities rather than only those who are smart enough to attend university. There is nothing wrong with attending university, but we must expand the opportunities offered to all women in this State. That makes good economic sense for New South Wales because it means we are using the merit principle to improve our workforce productivity. This State has a skills shortage and it makes no sense that employers are forced to choose from only 50 percent of the population. Encouraging women into non-traditional trades will address those skills shortages and close the gender pay gap.

The New South Wales Council on Women's Economic Opportunity is also focused on economic opportunities for women. Its membership includes industry leaders and men who will provide advice and develop strategies to encourage women to enter the trades. I am pleased that the Women in Trades Project is progressing well. In August I launched the Try-a-trade Trailer, which is a program developed in partnership between Women NSW and Supporting and Linking Tradeswomen. The trailer allows women and girls to try their hand at some basic trade skills under the watchful eye of female tradies. So far the visits of the trailer to schools and jobs expos have been a huge success.

The Government has also established a partnership with Ausgrid to promote and support women in taking up electrical trade roles. Ausgrid, with the support of Women NSW, is hosting a Women In Trades Work Experience week for high school girls in November this year. The young women who participate in the work experience bootcamp will be exposed to the work involved in electrical, mechanical, cable joiner and line worker trades, and will gain hands-on experience in wiring of light and power circuits. The participants will also have an opportunity to meet with female apprentices and staff to hear firsthand about the options for women in trades. Women NSW has also entered into partnerships with local government and industry to promote and support the recruitment and retention of women in traditionally male-dominated trades. For a small office, Women NSW is certainly punching above its weight.

Another priority is to improve services and lives with a strategic approach to reducing domestic violence through a new whole-of-government framework. The Auditor-General's "New South Wales Performance Audit into Domestic and Family Violence", released in 2011, was damning and we need to do a whole lot better. A new strategic framework is necessary and its goal must be improving services and lives. It is being developed in close consultation with the non-government sector because our partners contribute such valuable insights, experience and innovation. We need whole-of-government reform of the domestic violence service system and a consistent and seamless response to need. The new approach to domestic violence will ensure improved integration of service responses to domestic and family violence and will be underpinned by evidence of best practice in violence prevention and service delivery responses to victims. That is vital; we cannot do anything that has not been proven to work.

A third priority is building an evidence base on the status of women in New South Wales. That is why the first New South Wales annual report on the status of women, "Women in NSW 2012", published in July, is so important. It has achieved many goals and honoured an election commitment. It has strengthened gender-related data collection and analysis, and provided a wealth of information about women's outcomes in terms of health, education, financial security, leadership, safety and access to justice. A report of this nature is crucial in providing the evidence required to inform policy development, decision-making and action to improve outcomes for women across our society by both government and the private and community sectors. It is all about the power of data. I am pleased that the "Women in NSW 2012" report is already being widely disseminated and used across the community.

The Government is also focusing on the representation of women on government boards and committees so that our work for and on behalf of taxpayers is as good as it can be and again to show that the experience and potential of New South Wales women benefits every organisation and enterprise. Since March 2011, Women NSW has progressed a number of strategies to help increase the representation of women on government boards and committees. We all appreciate the importance of gender diversity on boards and committees. We must recognise that we have some exceptional female leaders in this State. We must bust the myth that no qualified women exist. We have taken a number of steps in making appointments. We are now working to put in place measures to make it easier to match appropriately qualified women with upcoming appointments. We are very pleased that in the first year of the O'Farrell-Stoner Government representation of women on boards has increased from 37 per cent to 38 per cent. We have not used quotas or regulated or mandated anything. We have simply provided Ministers and departments with the names of suitably qualified women who have been included on merit.

CHAIR: There is bipartisan support for reducing domestic violence. Many governments have tried their hardest to achieve that goal. You have outlined some of the initiatives that you have implemented. You talked about an improved approach to prevention of domestic violence. Can you expand on what you are doing?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Economists might look to the cost of domestic violence in New South Wales as a reason to justify a response, and they would be right to do so. As we know, it is not only about the extraordinary cost to government and the community, the police, the criminal justice system and the welfare sector; it is also people living safely, quietly and without fear in their own homes with their families. Some years ago Access Economics estimated that the cost to the New South Wales economy was \$4.5 billion a year and when we think of the extraordinary weight on police first-response for domestic violence it is not hard to see where that \$4.5 billion comes from.

Health practitioners look to the fact that domestic and family violence is the greatest cause of injury and illness in women under the age of 45 years in Australia. That is another justification for improving our response. There is a range of other damning statistics. Domestic violence is present in 50 per cent of households where children are also abused; it is an indicator. Many children are profoundly scarred emotionally, socially and physically by witnessing and often directly being caught up in domestic violence, and when they are very young children, as Maree Walk would confirm, it contributes to long-term damage in those children. We all struggle with forming trusting relationships and the judgements that they make in their lives. Domestic violence contributes nearly 20 per cent of homelessness in women and their children flee their own home.

As strong as those reasons are they are not really enough to explain why this work matters and it is because essentially it is a human rights matter. It is shameful that we live in a society where we still have domestic violence. It is shameful that there are some who still turn a blind eye to it and some who do not know how to intervene. All of those concerns are behind the O'Farrell Government's approach to responding. There have been a number of reviews—it has been heavily reviewed. The 2011 performance audit of the Auditor-General was damning of the former Government's response to domestic and family violence. It spoke of fragmentation of response, a lack of consistency, pathways for vulnerable women that were really cul-de-sacs and dead ends.

The performance audit also indicates the real problem, which is an ability to actually understand that no matter how much the services respond well, and the governance is clear and the people work productively together, we just should not tolerate it. It just should not be acceptable. I initiated an inquiry by the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues in New South Wales into domestic violence. As well as making a number of excellent recommendations about how to improve responses, the inquiry did recognise the importance of prevention and respect, and the right responses to perpetrators of domestic violence. As we looked around the country and in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, we see everywhere the emergence of the importance of work in the prevention space, and in tackling perpetrator behaviour.

The framework is progressing well given that information. We expect it will be available in March 2013. It will include some structural elements, a refined shared definition of domestic and family violence that will shape and better integrate every service response—police officers, child protection officers, medical practitioners and many others needing to work together with a shared definition of what it is and how to respond. Other structural elements include governance, as the Legislative Council review highlighted, strong and clear leadership is critical to underpinning change and the future arrangements are being actively debated across government and with the broader non-government sector at the moment.

I particularly want to see a strong role for the non-government sector in guiding and overseeing work in this area. Other elements are practice based. For example, we are working on a single risk assessment approach, based on common risk factors that can be adapted for use across different sectors and the different expertise of users. So that there is a standardised way of how we see and define domestic violence. The value of this will be twofold: we will be reviewing factors that indicate domestic violence through a shared lens; and that coordinated work between one practitioner and another will be better informed. There will be a warm pass rather than a cold pass because we will all have agreed on the basis definitions that we are talking about and that means women will not have to repeat and re-live their story over and over.

Still other elements are about understanding what is already there, and re-designing responses to better align with need: so elements such as the work on service mapping and gap analysis will inform our future response. Other elements are about how to do things differently which is a common theme today. We do need to always be looking for innovation and be able to grasp, develop and adapt good ideas. There will be a significant push to strengthen our knowledge base and to start to better realign responses around the evidence of what does and does not work. I want to be clear: I am not doing this alone. We have a range of players, Family and Community Services and particularly Women in NSW are working very closely with the NSW Police Force, the Department of Attorney General and Justice, the Ministry of Health, the Commission for Children and Young People, the Department of Education and Communities and, of course, the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

I can truly say that this project has a high priority in each of these portfolios. And as each of these elements are finalised I think you will see that. Domestic violence is also a community issue and no matter how hard governments work they will not stop domestic violence alone, which is why the broader community plays such a key role in this. I have started what I hope will be a close and ongoing dialogue with key community players about domestic violence. We have already held one round of widespread consultation in seven locations across New South Wales. More than 145 representatives from the coalface and from a broad range of organisations told us of their frustrations with the past, and their hopes for the future. They gave us counsel about definitions, and guidance about local governance. They told us they want change, and a new framework to drive a better response to domestic and family violence in New South Wales. They indicated their faith—a cautious faith, but one that I value—in working with this Government to make the lives of many, many women in New South Wales better.

There is more consultation planned. In fact, there are an additional two rounds in the same seven locations—Redfern, Liverpool, Blacktown, Wollongong, Wagga Wagga, Dubbo and Coffs Harbour—already scheduled for the coming months. This will continue to allow a broad range of people working at the coalface to share their experience and their expertise. We are going beyond these formal consultations to listen to those in the bush. There are supplementary consultations in locations that are less accessible so rural and remote communities can provide input about their specific needs and experiences. Aboriginal people and culturally and linguistically diverse communities will also be approached directly for their input and feedback. We are using government practitioners on the ground to tap into their networks and reach an even broader range of people.

There is no doubt that what the research evidence tells us, what the reviews tell us, what the community tells us and what our hearts and our conscience tell us is that we need transformational change in this area. There are two factors: prevention and perpetrators. We all want a society where there is no domestic violence. People might say that is naïve, but I think there is such an enormous range in the rates of domestic violence internationally, that there is no reason we have to accept that the rate we have is natural. The rates in the Pacific are far higher than here, getting up close to 100 per cent in some communities and some rates in Europe are much lower than ours. It tells us that culture and communities count and that you can change the incidence of domestic violence. We have to change the way perpetrators act so they ideally never become perpetrators and, if they do, that they cease earlier rather than later.

That brings me to the new grants. Unlike the previous Government—which tended to fund a lot of small projects and not really evaluate for the difference they made; for small projects that is very difficult—we want to make a difference and that means that there has got to be sufficient grunt in the system to do that. That is the new approach that we announced today that complement work to be done in reforming service response by trying to get into the dynamics of domestic violence and its root causes rather than just responding when the violence has occurred. There needs to be a real focus on both prevention and on perpetrator change.

The commitment of almost \$10 million over three years, as I have already advised the Committee, supports four key areas of work, but I would like to expand on it a little. We envisage closely working with others to develop prevention and early intervention projects that get to the heart of domestic and family violence

from strong relationships and relationship skills to alcohol as a precursor to domestic violence. Every one of these new approaches will be evaluated as it must to show us what we should and should not do.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
