

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 2

Tuesday 1 September 2015

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

AGEING, DISABILITY SERVICES, MULTICULTURALISM

The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. G. J. Donnelly (Chair)

The Hon. S. Cotsis
The Hon. P. Green (Deputy Chair)
Dr J. Kaye
The Hon. M. R. Mason-Cox

The Hon. S. Moselmane
The Hon. Dr P. Phelps
The Hon. B. Taylor

PRESENT

The Hon. John Ajaka, *Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Multiculturalism*

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 welcome Minister Ajaka and accompanying officers to this public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2015-2016. Before I commence I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I would also like to pay respects to the elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people who may be present here today. The Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Ageing, Disability Services and Multiculturalism.

Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast via the Parliament's website. A transcript of today's hearing will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, while members of the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I remind media representatives present here today that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside of their evidence at the hearing; so I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they may make to the media or to others after they complete their evidence as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take an action for defamation.

The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat. There may be some questions that witnesses could only answer if they had more time or they had certain documentation to hand. In those circumstances, witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any messages from advisers or members' staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber and support staff or the Committee secretariat. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to advisers seated at the table behind you.

A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the website from tomorrow morning. I ask everyone to turn off their mobile phones for the duration of the hearing. Witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence this morning. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. I also remind Mr Coutts-Trotter from the Department of Family and Community Offices that he does not need to be sworn as he was sworn at an earlier budget estimates hearing yesterday.

DENISE DAWSON, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Family and Community Services,

JIM LONGLEY, Deputy Secretary, Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Family and Community Services, and

KEITH STEVENS, Chief Financial Officer, Multicultural NSW, sworn and examined:

SAMANTHA TAYLOR, Executive Director, NDIS Implementation, Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Family and Community Services,

HELEN ROGERS, Executive Director, Participation and Inclusion Directorate, Programs and Service Design, Department of Family and Community Services,

LEONIE KING, Executive Director, Service Delivery Programs, Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Family and Community Services, and

HAKAN HARMAN, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: We will commence questioning, which will be done in rotations of 20-minute blocks between the Opposition and crossbench in three cycles.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, the Commonwealth and New South Wales were meant to sign the bilateral agreement by yesterday. That deadline has been missed. Do you know when the bilateral agreement will be signed with the Commonwealth?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: First, it was not a deadline as such; it was clearly anticipated that the bilateral agreement would be signed on or about the end of August. It is now 1 September. The New South Wales Government has a clear, ironclad commitment to deliver the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS], which is, as you know, the greatest social reform of our generation. I anticipate that the bilateral agreement will be signed in the near future.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Do you have a date or a time frame, because there are many people who are asking? We have heard Minister Fifield say that there may be delays. You have said that there will not be delays; you made that commitment in the House last week. Why is the Commonwealth dragging its feet?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I do not believe that the Commonwealth is dragging its feet. The fact that we have a 12-month early rollout in the Nepean Blue Mountains area, which was an incredible agreement with the Commonwealth, proves that both the Commonwealth and this State are 100 per cent determined to ensure that the NDIS rolls out in accordance with the timeline.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Sorry to interrupt you on that point but I understand New South Wales is eager and ready to sign. However, the Commonwealth and Mr Abbott are dragging their feet. Have you spoken to Senator Fifield in the past week?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: First, I do not agree with the comment you made that the Prime Minister is dragging his feet. I think that is a very unfair comment on your part.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: The Commonwealth is; it should have signed the agreement.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Ms Cotsis, do you want me to answer your question or are you going to keep interjecting?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: This happened a lot yesterday and I think it needs to be nipped in the bud as early as possible. Members should ask questions of the witnesses and they should not make statements to the witnesses.

CHAIR: Order! Continue your answer, Minister, and then a further question can be asked.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am happy to answer the question if I could just be given an opportunity to do so, Chair. If a statement is going to be made in a question that is completely incorrect I intend to answer it by saying I do not agree with that statement. I have to do that. I do not intend to have it said that I have agreed with a statement simply by being silent. If factual matters are going to be put to me I will answer those factual matters.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I do not need a lecture from you.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am not giving you a lecture; I am communicating through you, Chair. I am communicating to you as to what I propose to do. If I am wrong in that attitude, Chair, I am happy to hear from you. It is not a lecture.

CHAIR: Order! Minister, if I need to rule on a matter I will but I want to keep this moving along. When you complete your answer it will be followed by a further question.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: We have a lot to get out in the public domain. Minister, have you spoken to Senator Fifield in the past week?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I speak to Senator Fifield on a regular basis and I meet with Senator Fifield on a regular basis.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Did you speak to him last week?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am confident that the bilateral agreement will be signed in the near future.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Did you speak to him last week about the delay?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have made it clear to you that I speak to Senator Fifield on a regular basis and I meet with him on a regular basis.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Are there details not agreed to by the Commonwealth in this agreement and, if so, what are they? Are there details that have not been agreed to by the Commonwealth and is this why there is a delay?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The bilateral agreement will be signed in the near future. What is important to remember is that we have an incredible relationship with the Commonwealth. We were the first State to sign up to the NDIS.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I understand that and we supported you.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: We were the first State to do so and we will see the implementation of that agreement by 1 July 2016.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Thank you, Minister, you have answered my question. Can you tell the Committee where the next locations will be for the rollout? These are the details that people are interested in. Do you have details of the locations and time frames?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Of course, people are interested in those details and they will be made available in the near future. The bilateral agreement will be signed in the near future. Those details will be made available in the near future. You have to remember, Ms Cotsis, that we are ahead of schedule. New South Wales, when it comes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS] is clearly the number one State in all of Australia. We have proved that by a 12-month early commencement in the Nepean.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, I am not questioning that; I am asking about the Commonwealth.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: It is not Commonwealth estimates; it is State estimates.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Well, it is an agreement that has been signed between both.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, can I refer you to the Ombudsman's report that was recently tabled in Parliament? I refer you to this report. This is about deaths of people with disability—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am sorry; I missed the last bit you said. I apologise.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I refer you to the Ombudsman's report. You have read the report and seen the recommendations?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Can you advise the Committee whether the Government has responded to those recommendations?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: We are looking carefully at those recommendations. I take it that you are talking about the reviewable deaths in 2012-13, "Volume 2: Deaths of people with disability in residential care." That is the report you are talking about?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: That is right.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: So that was tabled in Parliament by the NSW Ombudsman on 29 June 2015. This report concerns the deaths in 2012-13 of 239 people with disability in residential care. Of these people, 51 per cent lived in accommodation delivered by the department; 42 per cent lived in non-government department funded accommodation—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, I have read the report and obviously you have read the report. I am asking you whether the Government will respond to the recommendations. There are 10 recommendations.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: There are 12 recommendations, Ms Cotsis, the first of which is, "Under the broad themes of recognising and responding to critical situations"—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I think we should understand what the recommendations are. It continues, "Effectively managing—

Dr JOHN KAYE: Point of order: The member was trying to ask a question. She might have got a minor detail wrong but I do not think that gives the Minister licence to read all 12 recommendations.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: To the point of order: The Minister is able to respond in the way in which he wishes to.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Once the question has been asked. It has not even been asked.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: The questioner does not dictate how he should respond to a question. That right should be respected and he should be given an opportunity to deliver his answer.

CHAIR: Order! The Minister needs to respond to the questions that are directly asked of him. That is what he needs to do.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am attempting to do so.

CHAIR: There is no provision for an opening statement at estimates committee hearings. The idea is that a question is asked and the Minister responds with an answer to each question.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am attempting to do so.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I refer to the Ombudsman's media release. By your account, he made 12 recommendations but the Ombudsman's media release states that 10 recommendations are directed to Health, Family and Community Services [FACS], the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the National Disability Insurance Agency [NDIA]. There are some important recommendations. On page 8, recommendation 10 states:

As part of transition planning, Health and FACS should:

- (a) establish joint disability/health committees in each district to promote and oversee capacity building in relation to mainstream health services.

What is your response to that, in light of what is happening with the transition to the NDIS?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The response is very simple. The report details the significant reforms that have occurred since the tabling of the last report. These include the introduction of the NDIS; the introduction of the Disability Inclusion Act 2014 that this Parliament has passed; amendments to the Community Services (Complaints Review and Monitoring) Act 1993; and, of course, the introduction of simplified information about reducing preventable deaths. All of that occurred since the issuing of the report by the Ombudsman has taken effect. So we have to take all of that collectively. The Government is not just responding to the Ombudsman's report. More importantly, this Government undertook a major amount of work in new legislation prior to and during the release of the report.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: When will you respond to the Ombudsman's report?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Again, using recommendation 10 as an example—the recommendation that you spoke of—strong relationships already exist and continue to be promoted between Ageing, Disability and Home Care [ADHC] and the Ministry for Health. Health, FACS and the Department of Premier and Cabinet are working together to establish a transition—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Point of order: The question was specific. When will the Minister respond? The Minister is reading material that is not relevant to the question asked by the member.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: To the point of order: The Minister is clearly demonstrating how the Government has acted on recommendations from the Ombudsman and indeed, from its own internal deliberations. I think what members might be mistaking is that Ministers can respond to issues that have been raised without having to go through a formal process of writing a government response to a particular set of recommendations.

CHAIR: Order! The Minister is obliged to answer questions that are put before him. I reiterate that point and I ask the Minister to respond to the specific question that was put to him.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I indicate, Chair, that I am attempting to answer the questions that are being put to me. Sometimes those questions require a bit of clarification. On the specifics of the question, Health, FACS and the Department of Premier and Cabinet are working together to establish a transition plan—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: When will the Government respond? This is ridiculous.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is the question that the member asked me. That will enable early identification—

CHAIR: Order! Minister!

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am asking the questions here.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: The Minister is responding to them. Stop interrupting.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, he is not responding.

CHAIR: Order! The Government made a decision not to ask questions which provides Opposition and crossbench members with an opportunity do so. I remind the Minister of his obligation to answer the questions that are put to him.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, I asked a simple question. Do you have a date when you will respond to the Ombudsman's report?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: As I indicated to you, the Ministry of Health, FACS and the Department of Premier and Cabinet are working together to establish a transition plan that will enable early identification of people accessing health services to facilitate a streamlined intake to the NDIS.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So when will that happen? Do you have a time frame, Minister?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Early data linkage work has identified that a significant number of people already access both Health and FACS services and therefore are identified.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, do you have a time frame?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The work is being done, Ms Cotsis. I have made it clear that the work is being done. Some has been completed and some is being done. Work continues to be done during the transition period.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Can you table the work that has been completed? Minister, you said that some work has been completed. Can you tell me what work has been completed and table that work?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have already indicated a number of issues but the member will not let me finish. I am happy to take that question on notice and table the rest of my answer as the member will not let me answer it.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So you will table that?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take the question on notice.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: On page 6 of the Ombudsman's report some serious issues have been raised by the Ombudsman relating to a protocol with the Department of Health. Have you spoken to Minister Skinner about those issues that relate to a protocol with the Department of Health? I take you to page 6 which states, "Planning for the health needs of people with disability in the transition to the NDIS". You made a statement but have you spoken to Minister Skinner about these issues?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Ms Cotsis, I speak to Minister Skinner continuously on all issues, including these issues.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Point of order: The Minister should address the member by her right title.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: To the point of order: The Minister got as far as saying, "I speak to the Minister for Health" before a point of order was raised. That is outrageous.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: My point of order is about the Minister addressing the member by the right title.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: He did not get half a sentence out before a point of order was taken.

CHAIR: Order! We all understand the protocol of referring to members correctly in this room. Minister, continue your answer.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Point of clarification, Chair, so I do not breach any protocol. My understanding is that when I am referring to or speaking about the Hon. Sophie Cotsis I use the term "honourable" but when I am speaking directly to her I use the term "Ms Cotsis". If that is incorrect, I will cease doing so.

CHAIR: Her title is the Hon. Sophie Cotsis.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have already said to the Hon. Sophie Cotsis on a number of occasions—and I will say it again—that the Ministry of Health, FACS and the Department of Premier and Cabinet are working together to establish a transition plan that includes early identification of people accessing health services to facilitate a streamlined intake to the NDIS. We are continually working on this. That is what we are doing. It is not just a matter of the health Minister and me, on our own, working on this; it is a matter of our departments working collectively on this with the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, will you provide a progress report to the Committee about where you are up to?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No, I will not, Ms Cotsis.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Why not?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Because it is not my job to provide you with a report. I will continue to work with the department.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: The Ombudsman has requested this, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: What is required to be reported will be reported.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So you refuse to detail what progress you have made. You just said that those agencies are meeting but you are refusing to disclose that information.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Ms Cotsis, I do not intend to sit here and report directly to you about the progress that is being made by my department.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am representing people who want this information, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am here to answer questions on budget estimates. That is what I am here to do.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am asking on behalf of people who need that information.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: If you think I am going to sit down weekly or monthly with you then you are mistaken.

CHAIR: Order! The Minister needs to be able to complete the answer to the question, which is then followed by a further question, if required. Have you finished your answer to that question?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, page 6 of the Ombudsman's report makes a reference to, "Support for people in assisted boarding houses." The Ombudsman then states:

With the withdrawal of ADHC from the disability landscape from July 2016, it is not currently clear where responsibility for monitoring, compliance and coordination activities relating to assisted boarding houses will be located.

Do you have an answer for that?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: To correct an error in your question, ADHC does not withdraw in July 2016; it remains right up until July 2018.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: That is what the Ombudsman said; that is not what I am saying. Are you questioning the Ombudsman?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is an incorrect statement that we are withdrawing in 2016. I think it is important for me to clarify that.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You can write to the Ombudsman.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: ADHC continues to exist right up until July 2018. Residents of assisted boarding houses who are eligible for the NDIS will be able to access individualised packages of support to assist with their daily living as the scheme rolls out across the State. This process has commenced at the Hunter trial site where a number of boarding house residents have successfully transitioned to the NDIS.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Who will take responsibility for the monitoring, compliance and coordination activities?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I was coming to that; that was to be my next sentence.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Will you provide a direct answer? Just answer the question.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Just be patient.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You gave up your time.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Just relax.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, you relax.

CHAIR: Order! I ask the Minister to directly answer the questions that he is asked.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am attempting to do that. With the transition to the NDIS, the Government will consider the future administration of the Boarding Houses Act. The outcomes of the development of the national quality and safeguard frameworks—which is what the Commonwealth and all the States are currently working on—and the Senate inquiry into the abuse of people with disabilities in care and residential settings, will inform what we are currently working on for the future administration of the Boarding Houses Act.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: What is the time frame?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: It will occur before July 2018, which is when it needs to occur. I intend to make sure that all the necessary information is available, both from the Senate inquiry and of course the safeguards that are finalised by the Commonwealth and the States, over which I do not have full control. As you would appreciate, all the other States and the Commonwealth are involved. When that occurs appropriate consideration and determination will be made. I do not intend to pre-empt it before that information comes out.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I refer to an important matter that has been raised by many parents and people living in government supported accommodation. As part of the NDIS rollout the Government plans to transfer all government supported accommodation for people with a disability to non-government organisations. What is the current status of that initiative?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The work is being examined and consultations are taking place. We would anticipate that the commencement will be towards the latter part of this year.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Can I interrupt? With whom are you consulting?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: We are consulting with all the relevant stakeholders. We consult with families, people with disability and advocate groups. We have independent experts who are currently examining the matter and who are ready to report back to me and to the Treasurer. The Government previously announced its intention to transition and we want to ensure it is done in the best possible way for the benefit of people with disability. We are waiting on final expert reports to come in and we are waiting for the finalisation of certain agreements with the Commonwealth.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Have you engaged those experts and who are they?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Correct. The experts are Ernst and Young and KPMG, together with the department.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: How many young persons with disability are still in nursing homes across New South Wales? Where is the Government up to in giving those people age-specific opportunities?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I know this is a concern to you and to me. The Younger People in Residential Aged Care program, which commenced in 2007, is a joint initiative program with the Commonwealth. The program provides 123 age-appropriate supported accommodation places to young people. In 2014-15, 10 vacancies were filled by nine people who moved out of residential aged care and one person was diverted from entering residential aged care. The Government has provided annual funding of \$27.2 million until the full implementation of the NDIS. The number of people under the age of 50 in residential aged care has decreased since 2007. I believe that there are still a number that need to be looked at in the near future. I see this is an absolute priority of this Government.

I also indicate that not just the Government is working extensively in this area to ensure that young people are moving into appropriate group homes, which is what I call them. The non-government sector, with funding from the Government and by leveraging its own funding, has also been undertaking extensive programs and building extensive accommodation. Only yesterday I visited a group home that accommodates 10 young people, five of whom came straight out of nursing homes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Does the funding of the non-government sector include accessing part of the \$27.2 million?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is part of the \$27.2 million. It is able to leverage it by putting in its own funding so that assists enormously. It increases the pool of funding, if I can use that expression.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: You said that the number of people under the age of 50 has decreased. Do you have the statistics?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I do not have the exact figures. I am happy to take that question on notice. Youngcare is a perfect example of a non-government organisation working with the Government and doing extensive work in this area.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Will you explain specifically how the rollout of the NDIS will enable the expansion of Aboriginal Jobs Together, the Disability Safe project, the Disability Enterprise Procurement Program, the People, Culture and Communication Project and other workforce developments and educational activities?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Not only will 93,000 people with a disability receive funding. The great news is that an additional 50,000 people also will receive funding under the NDIS. Some of those groups you mentioned have already received funding and they will transition to the NDIS. But the great news is that many within those groups who never received funding will comprise some of those 50,000 people who will be receiving funding for the first time. One of the great programs implemented by the Government to assist Aboriginal and other communities is the Ability Links NSW program.

Under that program is the Aboriginal linkers program which enables linkers from various Aboriginal communities to assist. We have linkers in other communities, including culturally and linguistically diverse [CALD] communities, who are able to assist. We are committed to building inclusive communities by developing Aboriginal specific strategies, providing resources and improving outcomes for Aboriginal communities. I mentioned Ability Links but it is also important to assist Aboriginal organisations to capacity build to be able to meet the additional demands that are placed on them to provide services.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Is that pilot program in some Aboriginal communities under the NDIS?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The trial first commenced in the Hunter and as the programs rolled out, including those to Aboriginal communities, we learnt from that and we changed. The Aboriginal Linkers program, which is not a pilot program, has now been implemented and is continuing. Capacity building is not part of the pilot program. Whether it was the industry fund, or some other funds that were implemented to help build capacity, that is continuing. The initial concern of many organisations was that they would not have the necessary funding or the necessary clients to continue. It became very evident in the early stages that that was not an issue; the issue was they needed to build their capacity to meet the extra demand that was coming in. That demand brings its own funding. Each person will have their own funding package. That is the work the

Government is doing to help build capacity within the NGO sectors, in particular the Aboriginal sectors and concentrating at the moment on culturally and linguistically diverse [CALD] communities

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Could you describe what the Aboriginal Ability Links NSW program is and how many communities there are in New South Wales?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The initial linkers program was commenced by this Government. I think we are still the only State to have the program. The other States have been looking at it and have indicated they want to copy it because it has been such a successful program. As the word indicates, a linker is there between a person with a disability and the planner to help link them to providers. I have some specifics for you. Ability Links was operational from 1 July 2014, with more than 260 funded linkers now employed across the State. We have 47 Aboriginal identified positions for linkers.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Forty-seven out of the 260 funded linkers identify as Aboriginal?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Correct.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What are we doing to try to boost that number? Obviously there are a lot of Aboriginal communities across New South Wales.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The linkers program continues to grow. The linkers program commenced at the Hunter trial site, where it is focused. It has now also moved to the Nepean Blue Mountains and it will continue to grow as and when needed.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Will you update the Committee on the effectiveness of the NSW Companion Card, which promotes the rights of people with a disability who require companion fare ticketing at events and venues? Will you indicate the feedback you have received from stakeholders about the card?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The feedback has been incredibly positive. There was an occasion reported in the media recently where a companion card was not provided. A review was undertaken and following that review the companion card was in fact provided.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: How did that happen? What is the other side of the story?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I would like to say that each and every time someone applies for something the box is ticked immediately and they get a companion card. What is important for me is that when a companion card was not provided there was a mechanism for a review. Clearly, that mechanism was effective. It was reviewed and the card was provided. When I first became aware of the case we are talking about I was surprised that the card was not provided at first instance. But it is important that the review worked.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That matter went fairly public before it was dealt with. Why did the review not work before it all went public? Was it only public pressure that suddenly made that review a bit more positive?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No, I do not think that is fair.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Was there a review before the matter went public?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take it on notice to make sure but my understanding is the review was being undertaken and a determination was being made. The media came out but that would have had no impact whatsoever on the review. The review is based on the merits. The department asked National Disability Services [NDS] that manages the card to review its decision, as the department is entitled to do. It was reviewed and the card was issued. As soon as it became evident that the card was not being provided there was a review mechanism, and it worked.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: But my question was: Did the review only take place after it hit the media or was it underway before that?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: My understanding is that the review took place prior to any media coming out and it may in fact appear that the review had agreed to a card being issued before the media came out.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I understand that Home Care Service of NSW has now been transferred to Australian Unity. Is that correct?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: A contract has been entered into. Settlement, if I can use the term, of the contract has not yet taken place.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Does the contract specify protections for employees who are to be transferred?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Correct. The memorandum of understanding was reached with United Voice, the union representative of employees, and the contract meets each and every one of those agreements that were reached with the union representative on behalf of the employees.

Dr JOHN KAYE: But not with the Public Service Association [PSA]?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: There are a very small number of employees out of the percentage that are represented by the PSA. We have attempted to negotiate with the PSA on a number of occasions. Sadly, the PSA will not come to the table to negotiate. The PSA seems to be more interested in work bans and hostile attitudes, which is a shame. If only they could take a leaf out of the book of United Voice it would be far better for their members.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Is it not fair to say that negotiation is a two-way street and the union would say that you were intransigent on a series of issues including, as it said publicly, protections of entitlements and ongoing employment?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I disagree with what the PSA is saying. The fact that we were able to reach a very good working understanding and relationship with United Voice, which covers more than 90 per cent of Home Care workers compared with the PSA's less than 10 per cent, has to prove that what the Government did was on the right track.

Dr JOHN KAYE: When you say "home care workers" do you mean Home Care Service workers or workers in the home care sector?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Over 90 per cent of Home Care Service workers that are being transitioned to Australian Unity are represented by United Voice. A sentence from a media release by United Voice states, "Home Care workers welcome the announcement by Minister Ajaka that the home care service ..." The vast majority, 90 per cent, are happy.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Let us go to the specifics. There are two years of secured employment in the contract?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes, and there is an up to eight weeks transfer payment.

Dr JOHN KAYE: The two weeks of secure employment is not vulnerable to action under the Commonwealth Fair Work Act?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: No, the two years is a firm guarantee. It is contained in the contract of sale. The new operator, Australian Unity, will issue each employee with a letter that contains a legally enforceable mechanism. It is a legally enforceable mechanism, so employees can either go through Fair Work or the court system or, if they choose, ask their union to represent them. The very clear commitment given in that letter is a two-year job guarantee from the point of transfer, which will be at the latest by late January, and up to eight weeks pay based on a period of service as a transfer fee.

Dr JOHN KAYE: The two-year guarantee trumps the provisions of the Fair Work Act?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The two years is a guarantee.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Are paid leave, superannuation and redundancy entitlements all protected?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Correct. The existing home care agreements have two awards, one for care workers and one for administrative staff. They become copied State instruments and those conditions transfer. People are able to remain in defined benefit superannuation schemes. The superannuation arrangements of people who are not in defined benefit superannuation schemes are protected. Staff have a choice before transfer of either taking their accrued annual leave with them or cashing it out. People get to take their accrued sick leave as well. They cannot cash it out but they can take the entitlement with them.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I understand that this affects about a third of all Ageing, Disability and Home Care [ADHC] employees?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: It is about 4,500 people.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Which roughly speaking is about a third?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes, it is roughly a third.

Dr JOHN KAYE: So there are other transfers to happen?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

Dr JOHN KAYE: As I understand it, there are another two large-scale transfers to happen.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: These are the transfers I mentioned earlier that we are examining. We are looking at that and we anticipate being in a position to comment on that towards the end of the—

Dr JOHN KAYE: Will you give us a guarantee that the employees who are transferred will have the same standard of protections with respect to employment and protections with respect to entitlements?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I can indicate to you, Dr Kaye, that my absolute priority in all of these transactions has been twofold: first, protecting the best interests of people with disability and, secondly, protecting the interests of our staff—because as far as I am concerned those two are interrelated and fundamental to ensuring a proper transition of services. I have demonstrated that with the Home Care Service of NSW transfer and the contract. I intend to do the same with the rest of the transactions. I am examining it. I am waiting for the reports to come in. But those two will always be my absolute priority.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I will take that as a no then.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No, you cannot take that as a no.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Well, can I take it as a yes then?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: What I am saying to you is that I will ensure that everything is done to protect the interests of the employees. But we also need to get the Public Service Association [PSA] on side with the other transactions. That has been a very difficult situation for us. Unfortunately it has not come to the table as, for example, United Voice did. I will be ensuring that all employees receive the appropriate protections that they are entitled to—that is what I will be doing, and I did that with Home Care.

Dr JOHN KAYE: That is a nice answer but it is either a yes or a no, and at this stage you are not prepared to give us a guarantee that the other employees of Ageing, Disability and Home Care [ADHC] will have the same protections when they are transferred to the private sector.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am prepared to guarantee that I will do everything to ensure the best interests of the employees, just as I did in home care. I proved that with Home Care. Dr Kaye, you are well aware of all the scaremongering that occurred from the Labor Party in relation to Home Care, and guess what? I proved it 100 per cent wrong.

Dr JOHN KAYE: And The Greens.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No, you did not do any scaremongering like Labor; it beat you hands down on the scaremongering, I am sorry.

Dr JOHN KAYE: There is no need to be mean to me, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: At the end of the day, I truly established, through what occurred with Home Care, that all of that scaremongering was nonsense. There is a process to be followed. I intend to follow those processes. I intend to ensure that the best interests of people with disability are maintained, and what is fundamental to that is to ensure the protection of our employees. I am doing that, and I will continue to do that.

Dr JOHN KAYE: How much was the Home Care Service of NSW sold for?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That has already been discussed in a press release so it is out there. I anticipate there will be approximately \$100 million remaining, and that \$100 million has been noted in the press release.

Dr JOHN KAYE: So the \$100 million will be the net proceeds—the transfer from Australian Unity to the Government—is that correct? Is that what you are saying? I do not understand what you mean by "remaining".

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: You can use the term "net proceeds". That is probably a good term to use.

Dr JOHN KAYE: What are the gross proceeds? What was the gross sale price?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I do not have that information with me.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Can you take that on notice?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take that on notice.

Dr JOHN KAYE: So the \$100 million matches the amount you said was being transferred to the disability services transition fund, is that correct?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The \$100 million that has been unlocked through the process will be reinvested in the New South Wales disability sector. I can give you an example. The whole purpose of that will be to assist with the transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS]—

Dr JOHN KAYE: Sorry to interrupt, but just to make sure I understand what you are saying, are we talking specifically now about the transition fund?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No, I am talking specifically about the \$100 million being reinvested into the sector. That will assist with the transition to the NDIS—for example, in capacity building, infrastructure and leverage for the non-government sector in building their own capacity and infrastructure. What has to be remembered is that the Treasurer and I will examine the best options for utilising these funds to assist people with disability. The entire fund goes back into the disability sector. That is what it is there for. It will not go anywhere else.

Dr JOHN KAYE: There is an object called the disability sector transition fund. Is that separate to the \$100 million we are talking about here?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: It is the same fund.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Now I am confused. So the \$100 million is going into a thing called the disability sector transition fund?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Correct.

Dr JOHN KAYE: And it will do the things you just said, is that correct?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I may have misadvised you, Minister, I am sorry; Mr Longley is shaking his head.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Is that a sackable offence?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I hope not!

Dr JOHN KAYE: Maybe it is a transferable offence. This is a minor point but I want to get it right. My question to you is: There is an object called the disability sector transition fund—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The fund exists. The \$100 million is going into the fund.

Dr JOHN KAYE: And that fund will do the things that you just spoke about?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That fund will do the things that I explained to you it may do as examples, and other things. What I have also said to you is that the Treasurer and I will examine the best way to utilise that \$100 million for the matters that we raised.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Just very briefly, is the expenditure from that fund at your discretion?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Under the provisions of the Enabling Act, any transaction and any funds collected require my approval and the consent of the Treasurer. It requires both of us to tick off on it.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, in relation to the Home Care Service transfer, Australian Unity has stated that under the conditional agreement Australian Unity will pay \$114 million. Is that the gross amount, and then the net proceeds are \$100 million?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I believe that is correct. Thank you for reminding me of the figures.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, you were questioned earlier about the administration of the fund. Are you saying that you will have control of the fund and the Treasurer will consent to the expenditure?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Ms Cotsis, as I indicated before, the Enabling Act, which was passed by the Parliament, makes it very clear that in relation to the transactions and the transfer of any assets under the control of the Minister for Disability Services, I am the Minister authorised in relation to that, with the consent of the Treasurer. I am sorry but I cannot remember the specific section. It may be section 30 of the Act or thereabouts. That is what the section specifically provides.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So will there be board advisers? Have you any timeline for when this fund will be established?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: As I have indicated to you, first of all, the money has not arrived so let me be very clear on that. We have entered into a contract. Settlement is anticipated sometime in the future. The Treasurer and I will meet to discuss a number of these aspects. We also have the other transactions that need to take place, and again I am awaiting reports, which I anticipate obtaining before the end of this year. We will examine all those matters and make the appropriate decisions. I can assure the Hon. Sophie Cotsis that between Treasury, my department, me, the Treasurer and the experts retained it is not simply a matter of whatever I decide will happen. I take all that advice very seriously. Again, my two priorities are people with disability and what is in their best interests and the best interests of my staff. I make my determinations in accordance with that.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, will you commit to providing a progress report to the Parliament and providing an open and transparent process around the establishment of the fund?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The Hon. Sophie Cotsis, I do not intend to report to you. I do not intend to provide reports to you. I am answering the question you have asked.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, I have asked about whether you will provide a progress report to the Parliament—that is my question.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: You are well aware that all actions required to be reported by me as Minister, required to be reported by my department, and required to be reported in accordance with budget estimates and the budget, are reported.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So will you provide a progress report?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: If you are asking me to come to you directly and provide you with reports, I am not doing that.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I have asked about reporting to the Parliament. You are refusing to answer.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Any reporting that is required by the department always takes place.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, I asked you a question earlier when you said that you were conducting consultations in relation to the transfer of supported accommodation. There was some mention that there were two lots of consultants—Ernst and Young, and KPMG. What is the cost of those consultants?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I do not have that information with me. I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You did not provide us with exact information in regard to the transition process. Will you provide a timeline and dates? Parents are very concerned. I am sure they have been asking you questions, as they have been asking me. Will you provide a timeline for them by the end of this year, for example?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Ms Cotsis, I meet with parents on a very regular basis.

CHAIR: The Minister will refer to the member by her correct title.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I find it difficult to say the Hon. Sophie Cotsis when I am speaking directly to her. I can tell the Hon. Sophie Cotsis that from all my discussions with parents that it is the scaremongering coming from the Labor Party and the PSA that causes the greatest concerns.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: People with disability, parents—

CHAIR: I remind the Minister that he has been invited to respond to a direct question. The Minister can take the question on notice if he does not have the answer before him.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am answering the question.

CHAIR: The Minister will respond to the direct question asked of him.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The direct answer to the question asked is that when I meet with parents they are incredibly happy, satisfied and eager to see the continuing work that is occurring under this Government. But when I meet parents I spend most of my time attempting to put out the scaremongering by Labor and the PSA. If that did not occur I can assure the Hon. Sophie Cotsis that parents would be feeling a lot better and a lot happier about the NDIS.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, I am asking this question on behalf of those in group homes and their parents. It is a very simple question.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: And the answer is—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Perhaps one of your bureaucrats, such as Mr Longley, will be able to answer it.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No, I know the answer. I am attempting to answer the question, but you are not allowing me to. I do not need the bureaucrats to answer the question.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, I am asking you whether there is a document that clients, families and service providers can view that details how this transition will work.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: We continue to inform clients. We did this, first, in the trial site that was undertaken and the report back has been absolutely outstanding. If I can give you a simple analogy: Of the more than 5,000-plus people who have transitioned to the NDIS, I have not had one person with a disability, not one family or carer, not one advocate group come to me and say, "I hate this. I want to go back to the old system." I do not know what more evidence you need that it is working—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: That is not the point.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: —and working well.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: The point is that everyone is concerned and they want to see the details. That is all.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: And details are being provided to the families and carers.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Do you have a plan that you can disclose?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I know the Hon. Sophie Cotsis has only had this portfolio for a very short period of time; I have held it for two years. I have been speaking to these families—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: This is not about—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have been speaking to these families for more than two years. You do not know what these families are saying, I do.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: And you do?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I do.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, you talk to a lot of people and so do I. I have held a number of roundtables. I am urging you and the Government to release transitional details—nothing more, nothing less. That is the first thing. The second thing is—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: Urging a Minister to do something is not part of the normal—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: On behalf of parents.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: —requirements of an estimates committee. The usual requirement is that questions are asked of a Minister and the officials at the table. It is not a public forum or a debate in Parliament. The honourable member should confine herself to asking questions.

CHAIR: I uphold the point of order. The questions should be directed to the Minister and he should answer them.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So you will disclose those transitional details to the Parliament?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have already answered that question.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, you have not.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes, I have.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, you have not and you have made a fool of yourself. Minister, in relation to—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: Gratuitously insulting witnesses is hardly within the remit of the Committee. The honourable member should confine herself to asking questions of the witnesses.

CHAIR: The Hon. Sophie Cotsis will continue with her questions.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Your budget release in June this year contained a \$28 million commitment to continue the redevelopment of the Hunter residences, which will transition people with a disability. Do you have a progress report? I understand—and correct me if I am wrong—that there might have been funding provided in last year's budget. Can you give the Committee an update as to how you plan to spend that money?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Last year's budget provided \$30 million for the acquisition of land, which is taking place. The \$28 million in this budget, which you have referred to, relates to the further acquisition of land and for some construction. That is well underway. Great progress is taking place in relation to that.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, can you identify the land that has been acquired? Is there a progress report?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Land is being acquired and I am happy to take that question on notice. If the member is asking me whether I know the address of every block of land acquired, I do not.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am not asking you that.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am happy to take the question on notice.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So you will take that question on notice?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Will you do the same thing in terms of the \$28 million in this year's budget?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take on notice details of the lands acquired to date.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Those two amounts total \$58 million. Have you done any modelling as to how many properties will be acquired and the necessary requirements to accommodate the people in these residences when transitioning them to new accommodation?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The honourable member can be well assured and comforted by the fact that extensive work has been undertaken by the department not only as to the acquisition of land but also as to the design and construction of the properties, as well as extensive communication and consultation with each and every person living in a large residential centre for their input and, if necessary, their families and carers as to where they wish to reside—to the extent of what room they want within the home, what paint they want and how it will be designed. Those with disability are at the absolute centre of all decision-making in relation to area, construction, method of construction and the fit-out as they are moving into their new home. That is the priority—they get to choose and move into their new home. That is what we are doing. Westmead and Rydalmere have proved that my department, a department I am very proud of, has absolutely done a splendid job on this. The same work will be undertaken in relation to the large residential centres such as Stockton.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, you mentioned that you have a design and construction plan. Is that correct?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The Hon. Sophie Cotsis may be really surprised to hear that we do not just go out and buy a block of land and then someone throws a house on it without anyone obtaining appropriate approvals from the council—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, I did not say that.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:—pursuant to appropriate architectural and engineering plans.

CHAIR: The Minister is being argumentative. The Minister will answer the question placed before him without argument.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I was not arguing.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, you mentioned that you have a design and construct plan.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I point out to the Hon. Sophie Cotsis that it is not my plan. I did not draw the plan up.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Will you be able to—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have made it clear that the department is meeting each and every necessary criterion. One of those criteria is obtaining council approval before any construction can take place. The member knows that. One cannot obtain a council approval without appropriate architectural and engineering designs and specifications. Clearly all of that is occurring. The home does not build itself.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I understand that.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Why is the member asking me these questions if she understands it?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am asking if that information has been disclosed.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Disclosed in what way?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: To the public? Have you got a progress report about the expenditure of those funds in relation to the build and construct of new housing?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I go out with the families and carers to look at the group homes about to be opened. The group homes are on record—they are there—and the record is clear as to what is being built and where it is being built. It is all there.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: If you have the information why do you not disclose it? Is it on your website?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: You asked me to give you the plans. What plans are you asking me to give you? Do you want me to tender every architectural and engineering plan of every group home ever built?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am asking for information on the expenditure so that we can see the number of new homes. That is what we need to know.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have already taken the question on notice and you keep coming back to it. I do not know which part of "I will take the question on notice and provide details" you did not understand.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I turn to the plans to transfer the management of government-supported accommodation for people with a disability to non-government organisations. How will disputes be resolved if some clients in a group home choose a particular disability service provider to manage their property but other clients in the same home chose to have their property managed by a different provider? Is there a dispute resolution mechanism?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Extensive work is being undertaken on that transition. One of my priorities, prior to any transition taking place, is to ensure that it is in the best interests of people with disability. I have made it very clear that those who are currently residing in group homes will be extensively consulted, as will their families and carers. The Government will ensure that the transition is in their best interests.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Will you outline the mechanism that will be used to resolve disputes?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I do not believe that there have been any disputes to date. Large residential centres have been discussed and there are no disputes. Under the National Disability Insurance Scheme, from 2018, people will have their own funding.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, you have assured me. Thank you. Can we move on now?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: People will be able to choose where they want to live. It will be their choice; they will have control. It will not be up to me to dictate.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: That is fantastic, Minister, but we need details.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: There will be individual control, not government control.

CHAIR: Order! Move on with the questioning.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, I understand that you are keen to look at how the National Disability Insurance Scheme affects culturally and linguistically diverse communities. You are aware that 25 per cent of people with a disability are from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Only 6 per cent access disability services, so there are many who miss out. What is the Government doing to increase the information available to people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities? A number of people do not access existing services. That is the first challenge. The second challenge is: How do we provide that information to multicultural communities?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is a great question. It is important to remember two things in answering this question. One aspect of the National Disability Insurance Scheme is that the budget doubles from \$3.1 billion to \$6.4 billion. The 50,000 people who have missed out on receiving funding in the past, many of whom are from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, will receive funding for the first time. One of the reasons the Government wanted to ensure the early rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme in the Nepean Blue Mountains was that the trial showed we were not receiving the necessary information to ensure that appropriate changes were being made. Information on early intervention for children aged from zero to eight was not forthcoming. There was also a lack of information on culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Of the first 4,000 people who signed up to the scheme, less than 1 per cent came from a culturally and linguistically diverse community. The Government committed to rolling out the scheme 12 months early to obtain that information.

To support people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities to transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the New South Wales Government and the National Disability Insurance Agency are working collaboratively to ensure that the transition is sensitive to and accommodates the needs of those communities. A good example is using people as links. People who have knowledge of religion, culture and language are available to assist people with a disability who come from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The Family and Community Services advisory group on culturally and linguistically diverse communities also provides regular advice and ensures that reforms reflect the expertise, experience and voices of those communities. The Government supports and extends the current capacity building in culturally and linguistically diverse communities and will continue to do that. I meet with many representatives from culturally and linguistically diverse communities who do incredible work in disability services. Plumtree is a great organisation that does amazing work and is often in contact with me. I have a disability advisory council that assists me enormously. It comprises representatives from a number of culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The council has done great work recently in assisting me and the department by providing research and feedback.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Will the Government fund any multicultural groups to talk to their communities? As you mentioned in your answer, there are cultural and language barriers. None of us want to see grandmothers of Mediterranean or Asian backgrounds, for example, pushing around their disabled grandchild because they have missed out on accessing existing services. How do we contact people at that level?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is a good question. A number of government programs are designed specifically for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The Government provided \$2 million for a market development fund for the multicultural sector, to increase the number and capacity of culturally diverse organisations. An allocation of \$450,000 went to National Disability Services to deliver the People, Culture and Communication project. Northcott disability service received an allocation of \$500,000 to deliver its Diversity in Disability project. The Ethnic Community Services Co-operative received funding to deliver two projects to culturally and linguistically diverse communities. A one-off payment of \$250,000 went to a capacity building project for culturally and linguistically diverse communities and \$253,000 was provided for the Ethnic People with Disability Program.

I take this very seriously, as I know other members do. A number of non-government organisations operate within and assist their ethnic group. The Estia Foundation is a good example. The Government works closely with non-government organisations and provides funding to them. People with disability want to be assisted by people in their own community who understand their culture and language.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I have questions about ageing. Many seniors continue to work past the age of 65.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I hope to be one of them.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, will you show how the Government promotes age-friendly workplaces and provides opportunities to make use of valued skills? The media uses phrases such as "dinosaur", "out of touch" and "move over and let someone else have a go". What is the Government doing to change that culture?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: You are correct that the mindset is the hardest part to change. I am aware that the Government can implement programs, make suggestions and provide funding but changing the mindset of employers is crucial. The NSW Ageing Strategy identified this and implemented a number of programs. The Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing [MACA] is doing extensive work on this issue, led by Kathryn Greiner. I will be 60 in a few months. I cannot understand how anyone can think that someone over 60 is a dinosaur and suddenly unfit to work. We need only look at Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile to see that any such comment is nonsense.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That is where the quote "dinosaur" came from.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Are you calling the honourable member a dinosaur?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No, I am not calling him a dinosaur, nor am I calling myself a dinosaur; I am saying the exact opposite. We have a number of key actions through the Ageing Strategy. We take a whole-of-community approach to spread this, we promote age-friendly workplaces, we provide opportunities that will harness the wisdom and experience of older workers. We need to do extensive work in relation to this. I am very pleased that the Government is leading the way in relation to the employment of seniors, but I believe that the Government must set the example and we, the Government—and by that I mean government departments and bureaucracy—need to be leading the way by example, not only for our seniors but also for people with disability.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Can you elucidate further what an age-friendly workplace looks like, given the fact that you are trying to implement it?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The Parliament would be a perfect example of an age-friendly workplace. One of the key merits of the Disability Inclusion Act that we passed in Parliament was that it was not meant to apply just to people with disability; it was also meant to set a mindset in relation to access. It is imperative that workplaces are able to offer employment and access to their premises, whether it be in relation to people with disability or for seniors. Again, the mindset—I can only give an example: In my old law firm I always preferred to employ anyone over the age of 50 rather than anyone under the age of 50 because for me they were just the best workers full stop. I had a clear mindset on that; they were great workers. To simply exclude someone over 50 or over 60 because of age is just ridiculous. I have just offended a few people.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I think it was in the spirit of wisdom, was it not, not necessarily the age separation there, Minister? The Government has allocated \$890 million to station upgrades and commuter car parks over the coming four years to make public transport more accessible for those with mobility issues.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Correct.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Have you liaised with the Minister for Transport to ensure that all stations have access for our ageing population?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I liaise with the Minister for Transport on all occasions. I congratulate the Minister for Transport and this Government. We have done more and injected more in four years in making

areas of transport accessible than the previous Government ever did in its 16 years. We had a lot of catching up to do; that is occurring. I am proud of the fact that in my time as Parliamentary Secretary for Transport I was able to see firsthand the great work that is being undertaken. It continues to take place, but are we doing it in every station today? No, we cannot. The reason we cannot is that we have much ground to make up for the Labor Party's failures in its 16 years. The previous Minister for Transport, now Treasurer, Gladys Berejiklian, and the current Minister for Transport, Andrew Constance, do incredible work on it and we will work with them continually in relation to this.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am aware of the Creative Ageing Local Government Grants Program is funded by the NSW Office for Ageing in the Department of Family and Community Services and is administered by Local Government NSW. Once approved, could you advise the Committee how the Government ensures these projects are implemented?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is a very good question. Appropriate feedback and information is obtained in relation to a number of the grants, but we are also looking at future grants—what other key indicators should be implemented in relation to it. I can assure you that a very thorough process is gone through before the grants are finalised. We ensure that the grants are best utilised in the areas where they need to be utilised. Whether it be the local government or whether it is community organisations or, in some cases, individuals that help deliver those programs, they do an outstanding job and the feedback that we get from many of the seniors is that they are very pleased with the grants and they want to see them continue. I have some more statistics if you want them, but they seem to get bored with statistics.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: No, I just want the truth.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Statistics are always true.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: In terms of elder abuse, what sort of reports are you getting in your office and what do you think we can do as a government to address this apparently growing issue?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I think I said this once before: I remember when we celebrated the first 1,000 calls that came into the Elder Abuse Helpline and I had to issue a press release to celebrate it. I found it really difficult that I was actually celebrating 1,000 cases of elder abuse; it just seemed completely wrong. But what we were truly celebrating was the fact that we became aware of 1,000 cases and were able to assist them, and that is something to celebrate. The figure currently is that as at 30 June 2015 we have received more than 3,000 calls with more than 2,500 relating to abuse and the other 500 simply seeking information. That figure is higher now; from recollection, we are getting close to 4,000, but taken as at 30 June it is definitely more than 3,000.

If ever there was proof that a program that this Government started is working it is the fact that we are receiving this feedback. As a result of that feedback, immediately it is sent to the right authority to assist. If, for example, it needs to be referred to the police it is referred to the police; if it needs to be referred to the Guardian or the Public Trustee it is referred to the Guardian or the Public Trustee; if it needs to be referred to my department it is referred to my department. What we have also been able to arrange—and this has assisted enormously—is assistance for cultural and linguistically diverse [CALD] communities. Utilising the services of Multicultural NSW and the interpreters and linguists we are able to link that phone call immediately. So if you receive a phone call from someone who is unable to speak English and the language is immediately identified, a conference call is immediately placed with an interpreter so that, again, the interpreter service is available and is able to assist.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, I note that you were touring with the Right Stuff conferences, which were held in Wagga Wagga and Nowra just recently. In terms of the conference focus on State and national reforms of NDIS issues, can you tell the Committee what sort of feedback you got from the conference from stakeholders and if there are any teething issues that may exist with the NDIS trials?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: It is interesting; the number one feedback I get is, "We would like to start immediately. Can we start immediately?" That clearly is a great positive feedback, but we have to remember that the entire scheme was developed on the basis of a three-year trial. We are now into the commencement of year number three. We were able—and we are the only State that was able to do this—to bring in a 12-month early start in Nepean-Blue Mountains. But it is clear, and everyone is aware of this, that the commencement for the rollout will occur on 1 July 2016 and we will be able to provide full details of that in the near future.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Minister, how many expressions of interest were received for the transfer of the home care services?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That remains commercial in confidence.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Why? The matter is over now; you have a purchaser, you have signed a contract or whatever to transfer it. Why is it commercial in confidence?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: A number of those entities did not want to disclose.

Dr JOHN KAYE: My question was not who they are; my question is how many are there?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: It is about numbers—I am realising that. Can I take that on notice and if there is no reason for it to be commercial in confidence I will provide a figure?

Dr JOHN KAYE: Let me put the question on notice to you this way: If you do not give us the number because it is commercial in confidence, can you explain why it is commercial in confidence, given the transaction is over?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes. I think that is a fair question.

Dr JOHN KAYE: The second part of that question is how many actually reach the tender phase?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Can I take that on notice on the same basis?

Dr JOHN KAYE: Yes, thank you. The final question is on selection criteria. Can you tell us about the selection criteria?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take that on notice as well on the same basis.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Can I go back to what we were talking about before? It seems to me that you have significant conflict with the PSA. Can you give us a guarantee that the ADHC workers who are covered by the PSA will not be punished because you cannot set up a good relationship with the PSA?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am happy to give you this guarantee: I have the utmost respect for the Ageing, Disability and Home Care [ADHC] workers and I made it very clear that my two priorities are to look after the interests of people with disability and to look after other workers. I could not imagine that anyone would ever consider, to use your words, punishing a worker due to the actions of their union. Please be assured, that is never going to happen.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Well, there is concern that what seems to be the best deal on offer, which is the one that you secured with United Voice, is substantially less in terms of duration, in point of protection, than the power workers got when the previous Government and this Government as well privatised that industry—that is to say, the electricity power station workers. Why is that? Is that because it is largely a feminised workforce?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Dr John Kaye, I say this and I say it on record and I hope you communicate it back to the Public Service Association [PSA]: My door is open to the PSA. I would like nothing better than the PSA to come and discuss with me, with an open mind, exactly the same way United Voice did. I am clearly on record, I have a precedent, if I can use that term, that shows that when a union comes and allows me to discuss it with them with an open mind great results have occurred. I am happy to guarantee you that my door is open for the PSA to come and talk to me. But at the end of the day my priority is not the PSA; my priority is people with disability and the workforce. They are my priority. If the PSA wants to keep working against me that is a matter for them, because I am going to keep working for people with disability and the workforce that provides incredible service to them.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Minister, can we talk about former clients of Home Care Services who are now clients of Australian Unity?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: They are not yet clients.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Thank you, they are about to become clients of Australian Unity.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes.

Dr JOHN KAYE: By the way, what is the settlement date, if I can use that expression?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The settlement date is anticipated to take place prior to the end of this year.

Dr JOHN KAYE: What are the safeguards for those individuals who are clients and what are the service obligations? I do not expect you to give it chapter and verse now but there will be sections in the agreements between the Government and Australian Unity of the contract that will specify that. Are you prepared to release those publicly?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Could I say this to you, Dr John Kaye—and I will take some of this on notice, because it will be an extensive answer—under the agreement, all clients will transfer to Australian Unity and all services will continue to run as normal, now and after the transfer. What is also clear to me, from discussions with Australian Unity post the contract being entered into, is that their clear intention is not only to continue to provide the existing services. Their aim and intention is to grow those services for the best interests of clients, remembering that there will be a substantially larger number of people seeking funding for the first time, just in the disability services sector. This company has an incredible track record. I am so pleased it is them. I cannot imagine that anyone could criticise them, with 175 years of existence providing incredible services, and they are mutual, for the benefit of their members. I am so confident that not only will they continue to provide those services but I believe they will improve and expand those services.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Can I take it that you will give us as much as you can on the guarantees and the safeguards as a question on notice?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Thank you, I appreciate that. I will go to the situation of clients who are under 65 years—64 years old, let us say—who will receive services under the NDIS because they have a disability. They receive services under the NDIS and when they turn 65 they are no longer eligible under the NDIS. How will they be supported in home care?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No, that is not quite correct. If you are under 65 and you are eligible to receive the NDIS and you receive the NDIS, when you turn 65—and I am quite happy for one of the department staff to correct me—but when you turn 65 you will have the option, you get to choose. No-one chooses for you. You will have the option to remain in the NDIS or to transfer to the aged care. It is your choice.

Dr JOHN KAYE: So I misunderstood—people can stay in aged care?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Absolutely. And, as you will appreciate, based on a person's individual circumstances, they are going to choose which of the two is best for them.

Dr JOHN KAYE: The Attendant Care Program and the High Needs Pool have been now merged into the Community Support Program. That is correct, is it?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Correct.

Dr JOHN KAYE: We understand that ADHC's Home Care Service is charging Community Support Program [CSP] clients a service fee of around \$68 an hour whereas the base rate available by other service providers is about \$48 an hour. Why is ADHC charging so much more?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take that on notice. I want to give you details.

Dr JOHN KAYE: We want to know the justification for that and how will that evolve once the CSP is transferred to the private sector and what will happen to those fees. I want to go to the issue now of disability housing, if I may.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: My favourite issue.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I am sure it is and I am sure it is one that keeps you awake at night.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Absolutely.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Minister, the question that I want to put to you is: There is obviously funding allocated for people who currently reside in the large residential centres to make transition away from those large residential centres. There is also under the Federal Government funding that is made available for people, through the NDIS or through other mechanisms, who require an integrated outcome between housing and service delivery. But what about the people who do not? What about the people who you cannot establish a requirement that they need to live in an integrated service delivery housing structure but they have a disability? I understand that they are required to be in the affordable market, the accessible market or private accommodation. What money have you put aside to help people in that situation?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is a good question. Could we just go back a step? The people currently receiving funding who are currently living in group homes or those living in large residential to be moved to the group home, their funding will continue and will be maintained within their personalised funding package.

Dr JOHN KAYE: That will cover their rental costs?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: You use the words "rental costs". The term being used by the NDIA is "use of capital" as part of the package. I call it "rental" as well, but no-one seems to like me doing that.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I do.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: So you and I are on the same page. The user of capital component will be part of their package. That user cost of capital component is being finalised between the agreement between the States and the Commonwealth and we anticipate that to be determined again within the near future, within the next few months. So that figure will come out. Each person is entitled to supported accommodation, to finalise the answer for Dr Kaye. Each person who will be entitled to funding for supported accommodation will have that as part of their package and they will have the choice and control to determine where they want to live, who they want to live with, using that funding component as part of their package.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, you recently revealed that 13 staff took voluntary redundancy [VR] from Multicultural NSW. Firstly, has that number increased?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: My understanding is that it is currently still 13 and no further redundancies have been taken.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Can you tell the Committee the total cost of these redundancies?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You will take that question on notice. Minister, did any of the 13 staff who announced they were taking VRs come from the regional offices, either Newcastle or Wollongong?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will ask the CEO [chief executive officer] to respond to that, if we are going to Multiculturalism. It was a difficulty, not knowing which area you were going to go into.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Multiculturalism.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Mr Harman will take that aspect of that question.

Mr HARMAN: Would you repeat the question please?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Do any of the 13 staff who have taken voluntary redundancies come from the regional offices of Newcastle or Wollongong?

Mr HARMAN: Yes, one of them.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: From which office?

Mr HARMAN: From the Newcastle office.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: One out of 13 who took redundancy is from Newcastle?

Mr HARMAN: Yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, in relation to the redundancies, will you advise the Committee where they came from? You have said you have changed the organisational structure but are they policy holders? What were their main positions?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The chief executive officer will answer in relation to the restructure.

Mr HARMAN: The Multicultural NSW agency in the past 18 months has gone through a fairly substantial transformation, commencing with an extensive stakeholder consultation to develop a whole range of recommendations about the future directions of our agency, which resulted in a new organisational structure. To implement and transition to the new structure, a change management plan was approved by former Minister Victor Dominello in October 2014. Since then I have been working through with the various departments of the bureaucracy and under the guidance of the Minister and the Secretary to implement our transition. In that, there is a significant increase to our resources in policy, government policy and research capacity and also an increase to one of the other focus areas of our agency which is community engagement. A part of that is a reconfiguration of our regional advisory councils which will see us expand our regional advisory council structure throughout the State.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am sorry to interrupt you but you have answered my question. Through the Minister, you did state that this will mean an increase to resources. How can cutting staff—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am happy to answer that. The first fundamental aspect that should be remembered is that Service NSW, which is now in 41 offices—trialled in two and now extended to 41 offices around the State—is providing those services in particular in relation to the translation of document services. So where—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, are you saying—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Let me finish.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You have just raised an issue.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Can I just finish my answer?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are saying that you will use Service NSW—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: We are already.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are outsourcing—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No, it is not outsourcing.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: —all the translation and interpreting services?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: There is no outsourcing. If you allow me to finish I will make it very clear. Rather than a person having to travel from, for example, Wollongong all the way into the city to have a document translated, a person can now go to the Service NSW office in Wollongong and lodge that document for translation.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Are you confirming—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Will you allow me to finish?

CHAIR: Order! The Minister will complete his answer.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am trying to.

CHAIR: Would you please complete your answer, Minister?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Thank you, Chair. That document will then be forwarded to Multicultural NSW for translation.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I do not need to know the detail. Minister, will you be closing the Wollongong office of Multicultural NSW?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Service NSW which is now providing services in Wollongong is already there. It is providing the services via Service NSW.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Is the Wollongong office closing? Yes or no?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: The Wollongong office of Multicultural NSW is closing.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Correct.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Have you consulted with multicultural communities in Wollongong and the Illawarra?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Do you want me to consult with the communities that can now walk into a Service NSW office and obtain all of the services they need in a bigger, more prompt and more efficient office?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, why did you not tell the people of New South Wales—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Is that the way you do business?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: —prior to the election that you were closing the Wollongong office of Multicultural NSW?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: We are offering a more efficient process.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You need to be cloned, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes, I know. They want us to do it the way they did it.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Your Government has downgraded the commission—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Lots of Ajakas in every office.

CHAIR: Order! One person will speak at a time, a question asked and an answer provided.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The answer is we have already consulted widely. Also the feedback from our stakeholders being able to use Service NSW is a 100 per cent success rate. Instead of people waiting for hours in offices, lining up, they are in and out of a Service NSW office in less than 10 minutes. That is a great result for the people of New South Wales—something that you should have thought of doing yourself.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So you are downgrading. Will the Multicultural NSW office in the city be closing?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It will not be closing?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You will not be transferring the office to Western Sydney?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That may occur but that is not closing an office.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It may occur?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Transferring an office—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It may occur?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Are you going to allow me to answer? Transferring an office from one location to another location is not closing an office. The functions are still provided.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It may occur?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: It is something that I am looking at.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You have just said that the closure of the city office may occur—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No closure is occurring.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: In the city?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: A transfer may occur.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Are you looking at transferring Multicultural NSW to Western Sydney? Yes or no?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The answer is yes, we may well be doing that.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: So you are going to Western Sydney. Will you advise the location?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Not at this stage.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: When will you advise of the location?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: When will I advise you? When you find out; when I tell you.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: When will you advise the Committee and the people of New South Wales?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: When I make the announcement you will know.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You have already made the announcement now.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: You want me to say, "My God, we are going to transfer an office". What a big coup.

CHAIR: Order! Let us retain civility and have questions followed by answers.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: If the question was asked with civility I would answer it with civility. But when a question is asked with terrible imputation, then I am going to react appropriately. The questions being asked are ludicrous.

CHAIR: Order! Minister—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: This Government has committed—

CHAIR: Order! Minister—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: —to providing the best service to people in the multicultural space.

CHAIR: Order! Minister, it is not for you to determine the questions being asked. The questions are asked and you are invited to respond.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: But there is an order of how questions should be asked. Clearly the standing orders—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Are you going to tell me how to ask questions?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: —set out that questions should not contain argument.

CHAIR: Order! Minister—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: And yet you allow that to happen, Chair, and I am very surprised.

CHAIR: Order! I am being very balanced. I am trying to retain a balance between the questions and the answers.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Is there a second stage to the redundancy process?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I make it very clear: Multicultural NSW under the Multicultural Act is bringing out a more efficient way of conducting and providing business, something your Government failed to do.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: It is a simple question: Is there a stage two or not? Yes or no?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: As a result, we are offering services to people. We are providing more services.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I take it the answer is yes.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: We are providing more funding. We have provided an increase in funding. We are allowing people to use 41 service offices as opposed to dragging them into the city. That is 41 offices through Service NSW. It is a great result.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I will go to the next question, given the Minister is not answering the question.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am answering the question.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: New South Wales is getting the largest proportion of migrants, yet rather than increasing the number of personnel and services in the CRC [Community Relations Commission] you have downgraded it from a commission to a board, and I am not sure what the next step is. The question is: Why are you not increasing the number of personnel, rather than reducing the number, when there is a great need for services for migrants coming into New South Wales?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I do not know how you do your mathematics but take the situation where you increase staff by allowing 41 Service NSW offices and their staff to now assist and work with Multicultural NSW. If you want to take the total staff who are operating in Service NSW and the total staff who are operating in Multicultural NSW, the total staff of translators and linguists, I can assure you there is no reduction in staff when it comes to providing services. The exact opposite is occurring. You just want to ignore the 41 Service NSW—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am talking about the CRC and Multicultural NSW. I am not talking about the other departments and places.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: —and their staff. That is what you want to do.

CHAIR: Order! Do not talk over each other. Has the Minister come to the conclusion of his answer to that question?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Will the Minister give a guarantee that he will not outsource the translation and interpreting service?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: First of all, the translation services provided by 650 translators and linguists are retained on a contract basis and hourly rate by Multicultural NSW. With all due respect, your question makes no sense whatsoever.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It makes a lot of sense.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No, it does not.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: You put out a press release calling for submissions in relation to strengthening our multicultural society and working together against hateful and violent influences. How many submissions have you received?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: There have been more than 35 submissions in addition to multiple proposals, supporting documents and discussion papers.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Will you need more staff to administer the operation of that project?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No. The project is being administered quite well and it is working quite well. I am going through the submissions carefully. It is interesting to note that I did not receive a single submission from anyone in the Labor Party. Not one.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: That was not the question I asked.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: If it was that important to you I would have thought you would have put a submission in.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: What do you understand to be hateful and violent influences and how do you address that as a Minister?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Are you really going to ask me a question of that nature in budget estimates? That is what you are going to ask me?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes. You are the Minister.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will answer it this way: It is an incredibly complex and difficult issue that requires very clear consideration. It was for that reason that we allocated the \$4 million in our budget. It was for that reason that the Premier tasked me to meet with all relevant stakeholders.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But you would have an objective. That is my question.

CHAIR: Order! The Minister is permitted to complete his answer.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: It is for that reason that I am meeting with all relevant stakeholders, many of whom are experts in this area including academics, community leaders and those providing incredible community service. That is why I am meeting with them and obtaining that information. I made it very clear to each and every stakeholder that I did not come with a preconceived idea of how or where the funding should be

utilised. I came to them on the basis of listening to their expertise so that I could take it back and formulate a response. That is what I intend to do. We are faced with a terrible situation with some of our youth. I do not want to see us losing one more young person overseas who believes that the whole basis of life is to kill or be killed. That is why the Government is acting on this. Again, I know I have not received one submission or contribution from a single member of the Labor Party. Shame on you.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Have you engaged any consultants for your Multicultural NSW organisational restructure?

Mr HARMAN: Yes, we did have assistance from external consultants.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Who were the consultants?

Mr HARMAN: Fyusion.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: How much did they cost?

Mr HARMAN: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: As many of us know, language is a very important skill. Thousands of public servants speak a second language to support our many migrant communities across New South Wales. Examinations of the Community Language Allowance Scheme [CLAS] have been on hold since at least 25 June this year. Why are those exams on hold?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The New South Wales Government's Community Language Allowance Scheme is an allowance paid to selected New South Wales public sector employees who have a basic level of competency in a language other than English and who work in locations—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I know what the CLAS is. Multicultural NSW does the examination. Why are they on hold?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Employees who have already been certified to—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Can you explain—

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Point of order—

CHAIR: Order! The Minister must answer the specific question asked and not give a question time type of answer.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Those who have already been certified to receive the allowance continue to receive the allowance.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: That was not my question. We know there are public servants receiving the CLAS, but Multicultural NSW has put the exam on hold. Why is it on hold? Will you stop the CLAS?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Because there is a review going on.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You could have said that.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: You needed to ask for the information.

Dr JOHN KAYE: My questions go to the Multiculturalism portfolio. You would be aware that TAFE NSW Outreach, which has a significant multicultural function, has been in a state of total decline over the past two years. You would also be aware that a number of multicultural educational coordinators in TAFE have either lost hours or lost their jobs entirely. Were you consulted by the relevant Ministers when those changes were made?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am currently undertaking an extensive amount of work with the Minister with responsibility for TAFE, the Hon. John Barilaro. Your question relates to his portfolio and some parts of it

relate to Education and Minister Piccoli. You can be assured that I am speaking to Minister Barilaro in relation not only to Multiculturalism but also to Ageing and Disability Services.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I am sure that you do not want to give away confidences between two Ministers, nor would I seek for you to do so, but are you raising with him the consequences of the changes for multicultural communities, particularly for women from CALD backgrounds who are amongst the long-term unemployed?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will note that question. It is a very important question. I do not want to go into the specifics of what I discuss with another Minister. Please be assured that I am continually having discussions with both the Minister for Education and the Minister with responsibility for TAFE and will continue to do so in relation to all the portfolio areas that relate to me.

Dr JOHN KAYE: The rate of successful grant applications in your area was about 40 per cent. Is that correct?

Mr HARMAN: Specifically within the multicultural area, yes, that is correct.

Dr JOHN KAYE: That means that 60 per cent of the effort of writing grant applications was wasted. I am picking on you but this is a general problem everywhere. What are you doing to increase the rate of success of grant applications and reduce the waste of time involved in them?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is a great question. One of the things I keep reminding people of and you would be surprised by how many of the applications that are put in never met any of the criteria and were never going to be successful. But there seems to be a mindset within certain organisations in which they believe it is appropriate to put in as many applications as they can whether or not they are eligible. That applies to not only Multicultural NSW but also some of my other grant programs where the same application is put in for numerous different grants. When you say 60 per cent are unsuccessful it is not a fair figure because you need to understand that quite a number of them were never eligible and should never have applied. What is important and what the department ensures occurs is those who put in an appropriate application and have an appropriate program are given the funding. I would rather see the 40 per cent that are eligible receiving the funding than it going to those who should never have received it at the cost of those who are eligible.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Are you taking steps to inform grant applicants—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Absolutely. We do it all the time. We make the criteria very clear. I have spoken to a number of people who have said, "Look, we applied for a grant with your department. We knew we were never going to get it but we thought it's like a lottery and maybe our name would get pulled out of the hat." It is really sad for them to have that mindset when thinking of their own wasted time let alone the waste in our department by having to go through those applications. Yes, better communication and more communication needs to go out with the grant applications. The criteria are spelt out very clearly but mindset is a difficult thing to change.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Thank you, Minister; I appreciate that answer. Minister, this is analogous to the previous question I asked you about TAFE. You would be aware that there have been substantial changes in the way that school education is organised in New South Wales, largely under the banner of Local Schools, Local Decisions. There has been some debate about what that means for the delivery of what I now have to call "English as an additional language or dialect" [EALD]—I know it as "English as a second language" or ESL—that is, support for people who come from a linguistic background other than English.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Are we talking about culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds [CALD]?

Dr JOHN KAYE: No, that is CALD—we will get to that in a minute.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I know the program you are talking about.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Minister, have you had discussions with the Minister for Education in respect of the delivery of EALD or ESL services?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: As I have indicated before, Dr Kaye, I am sorry I cannot be more specific but I do not intend to go through the specific discussions I have with a Minister. But please be assured that any matter that comes within my portfolio or that relates to one of my portfolios is a matter that I will discuss with all relevant Ministers, and I will continue to do so. Your question really needs to be directed to the Minister for Education in relation to schools and needs to be directed to the Minister for Skills in relation to TAFE.

Dr JOHN KAYE: That is correct, and in fact I directed a question about EALD services to Minister Piccoli yesterday. Without wishing to show my punches before I throw them, there will be a question to Minister Barilaro. My question to you specifically is: Is there an advocate for people from non-English speaking backgrounds in these changes? These are large-scale changes. Is somebody sticking up for people who generally do not have a strong voice? As these new structures are designed—and my position on both of them is well known—is there somebody in the Cabinet room, and even outside of the Cabinet room, saying, "We need to be very mindful of what this means for people who come from language backgrounds other than English"?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: There are two parts to answering your question. Part one is that I am in Cabinet continually arguing in relation to every one of my portfolios, and I will continue to do so. Coming from a CALD background myself, please be assured that I understand it and understand it well. Also, there is Multicultural NSW. Through the Multicultural Policies and Services Program other agencies are required also to communicate with Multicultural NSW in relation to areas that specifically come within the Multicultural NSW Act. So you have two of us doing it.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Can I ask then, and this is not to you, Minister, but through you to Mr Harman, whether Multicultural NSW has been in communication with the Department of Education and Communities and the department of skills with respect to both TAFE and schools?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will provide the same answer—that is, I am not going to go into specifics. To be fair to you, Dr Kaye, I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, I would like to revisit some of the issues around the Wollongong office of Multicultural NSW shutting down, or resiting, depending on how you put it. Minister, you said that you consulted widely on this. Was the Parliamentary Secretary for the Illawarra and the South Coast aware of the changes? Did you speak to him about the changes?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Personally, no.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What about professionally?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: So he is not aware that the office is closing down?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: At this stage I have not spoken to him about it.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Has anyone from your department spoken to him?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am not aware. I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, you said that you consulted widely. How could you close it down when you are not aware whether the Parliamentary Secretary for the Illawarra and the South Coast has had conversations about this?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I indicated that the department is widely consulting in relation to all of the restructures taking place.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I was not made aware of that change either, despite the fact that these job losses down there are potentially on a scale of magnitude. I would think that those jobs are very important down in Wollongong.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: But please understand that there has been a substantial increase in jobs in the Service NSW offices that are also dealing with this area.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I do take your point. I make it very clear that I am not speaking for or against the idea of Service NSW as a one stop shop.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I understand that.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am merely talking about this office to meet the needs in this location.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Can we be very clear that the Wollongong office is a one-person office.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Right, thank you.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: And the amount of work being undertaken by Service NSW now in relation to this area is more than a one-person office.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That is fine. Quite often those one-person offices, particularly in the multicultural sector, may have 20 or 30 key people under them. Minister, this is a very important issue. Certainly in my area there are key people in the multicultural services. They may have 20 or 30 people under them from multicultural communities. They are key players. You cannot just take them out because they are like the pillar and the voice for the multicultural community. My question is: Will that one person be working in the Service NSW Wollongong office or will he or she be re-sited to the Sydney office?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take that question on notice and come back to you. I can indicate to you on the work being done that the funding being provided in relation to multicultural affairs is also provided to a number of community organisations who work with and are part of assisting Multicultural NSW. They are our eyes and ears, if I can use that expression, throughout the Illawarra. I have continued their funding—in fact I have increased their funding this year; and they are incredibly pleased about that. We are talking about one administrative person in an office. Instead of having to line up and wait for hours, people are now able to go into Service NSW for more efficient service from more people.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, with all due respect, they might be one person but if that person is the pillar to the building then it goes without saying what will happen. We shall move on. Can you outline the role of the Multicultural Youth Network and its effectiveness in promoting multicultural diversity in young people, particularly in rural and regional areas?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Quite a bit of work is being undertaken through the various multicultural youth programs, in particular programs mentoring youth to ensure that they are—if I can use the expression—moving on the right path. I have gained some incredible feedback as to this \$4 million program from the submissions received and the various meetings I have attended with the various multicultural communities. The big emphasis is not only about the mentoring but also about making opportunities for youth from different cultures and backgrounds. Whether we are talking sport, centres, religious education and things of nature, those areas are continually being examined and programed. I am happy for the chief executive officer to add anything further in relation to that if he wishes to do so.

Mr HARMAN: The Multicultural Youth Network is a part of the community engagement strategies of Multicultural NSW. Two of the members on our advisory board fit the youth category. They lead a number of initiatives and have a strategic work plan for each year. By way of example, last year they conducted consultations and engagements with youth at Blacktown and Fairfield, and they have run some workshops with the Bankstown Multicultural Youth Service network at Bankstown. They perform an outstanding community engagement function and are involved in our various engagement forums as well.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I understand that the Community Relations Commission organises the Youth Harmony Festival.

Mr HARMAN: Correct.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That festival usually draws thousands of people from various faiths, races and ethnic backgrounds as they spend the day enjoying food, song and dance. Minister, I have three questions for you. First, will the festival be happening next year? Secondly, will the Government be allocating any

funding towards it? Thirdly, as it is proving so successful, will the festival be rolled out in strategic areas across New South Wales?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take those questions on notice. The festival has been incredibly successful; there has been great feedback about it. I also indicate that a number of non-government organisations, in particular religious organisations, have also been following suit and doing exactly the same thing—namely, knocking on our door seeking funding or some contribution for funding—and they have been very successful. But I will come back to you with the specifics, in particular about rolling it out in other areas.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, are you aware of the budget allocation for this?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take the question on notice. I have a figure in mind but I want to confirm it.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and your officers for attending this morning. We appreciate your participation.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Thank you.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
