

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 2

Monday 6 November 2000

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

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

The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans

The Hon. R. S. L. Jones

The Hon. A. G. Corbett

The Hon. R. D. Dyer

PRESENT

Department of Community Services

Ms J. Westacott, *Deputy Director-General, General Business*

Ms C. Peltola, *Executive Director, Child and Family Services*

CHAIR: I note that the Hon. R. S. L. Jones has joined the committee today. I welcome the Deputy Director-General and senior officers to the hearing of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2, which is inquiring into the budget for Community Services. I thank departmental officers for attending today. At this meeting the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure from the Consolidated Fund for the portfolio area of Community Services. Before questions commence, some procedural matters need to be dealt with. As members are aware, part 4 of the resolution referring the budget estimates to the Committee requires the Committee to hear evidence on the budget estimates in public.

Under Standing Order 252 of the Legislative Council, this Committee has resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of its public proceedings held today. The Committee's resolution conforms to the guidelines governing the broadcast of proceedings adopted by the Legislative Council on 11 October 1994. The attendant on duty has copies of those guidelines. I emphasise that only members of the Committee and the witnesses before them may be filmed or reported. People in the public gallery are not considered to be part of the proceedings and, therefore, should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, as with reporting the proceedings of both Houses of Parliament, members of the media must take responsibility for what they publish or the interpretation that is placed on anything that is said before the Committee.

I advise that the Committee has agreed to the following format. Each member will be given adequate time to ask questions on a fair basis but any matter that is raised by one member can be followed up by any other member until that matter is completed. There are a number of matters that I should point out. The witnesses are not sworn. They appear with the approval of the Minister. The Committee will ask a series of questions. I trust that the witness will be able to answer them.

It should be noted that any members of the media who are present must take responsibility for anything they report. As a standing operating procedure of the Legislative Council, these hearings are public hearings. If anyone wishes to use the hearing in any way, that person must take responsibility for anything that is used or for anything that he or she says about the hearings. That having been said, I have a couple of questions I wish to ask briefly first.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Chairman, I seek your procedure advice or confirmation of what the position is. The 11-page document that has been circulated this morning discloses that the questions are questions placed on notice on or after the previous hearing.

CHAIR: Yes, I will explain. It should be understood that this meeting is held to follow up the questions that were not answered at our previous hearing. Those questions were taken on notice by the director-general. I will come to the full detail of that shortly, but we will be constrained to those specific questions and any very specific questions that follow the answers that are given. Is that what you wish clarified?

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Yes.

CHAIR: That is the nature of this meeting.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: I wanted the witness to be clear as to the substance of the meeting from a procedural point of view. I was seeking confirmation of, in effect, what the Committee is doing—that is, asking questions arising from questions that had previously been asked and remained unanswered.

CHAIR: That is right. We are specifically directing Ms Westacott to give clarification of answers provided or not provided but taken on notice which flowed from the previous evidence and questions of the director-general and other members of the department who were here. Can I first ask why these answers were not provided as promised by the director-general?

Ms WESTACOTT: My understanding is that the bulk of questions have now been tabled. You would appreciate the amount of work that is required in responding to those questions. There were many questions on notice and some of them were of a very complex nature. A lot of resources are required to answer those questions and, in turn, it is important that those questions be checked and validated for their accuracy to ensure that the department gives the Committee accurate information.

CHAIR: These questions flowed from the hearing held two months ago. The Committee was promised answers by the director-general. The Committee got a letter from the Minister saying they were not going to

bother because the process was over. Had the department gone to the trouble of beginning to answer those questions when we, the Committee, were told by the Minister that she was not going to bother? In other words, following the meeting, did the director-general pass those questions to the department for answers?

Ms WESTACOTT: The questions were passed on to the department. As I can only repeat, a lot of work has gone into preparing the answers. As I understand it, a couple of them have been tabled today. I can only say—

CHAIR: Halfway through, did you get a direction from the Minister not to bother answering the questions? Was there a period in the middle when those questions were not being prepared for answer?

Ms WESTACOTT: No. There was no direction not to answer.

CHAIR: So when the Minister wrote to the Committee saying that you were not going to bother, in effect—I think that is a realistic summary of what was said—and they were not going to answer those questions because they thought that the process was almost complete, did that restrict your answering? Did she inhibit that response?

Ms WESTACOTT: No-one told me not to answer.

CHAIR: So you were burrowing away, working on these answers for the last two months?

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct.

CHAIR: We still have not got those answers—just dribs and drabs. You will notice that we have not called on the Department of Aging and Disability, because the follow-up questions were taken on board and answered to the satisfaction of members of the Committee. But with the Department of Community Services, members simply have not had a chance to assess the answers and check whether they completely answer the questions taken on board and if they are satisfactory. After all, we are not asking these questions for our own purposes.

We are asking these questions for the people of New South Wales as part of the estimates process. I think that all Ministers and departments should take notice of the fact that these Committees are determined to get answers to their questions, constrained as we are by standing orders of the Parliament. The process is not perfect by any means, but it is the only opportunity that people have to question and examine the operation of executive government and departments. I understand that it has taken almost 2½ months to get some of these answers, and we still do not have all of them. This is almost our last throw of the dice to try to get answers. If you are unclear about any of the questions that are put to you by members, please ask that they be clarified.

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

CHAIR: With the approval of the Committee, we will start with the Hon. R. S. L. Jones. Although he is not a member of the voting panel of the Committee, he was present at the last hearing and a large number of his questions were taken on notice.

The Hon. R. S. L. JONES: You answered all the questions that were not answered previously, but I have not had a chance to look at them. I would like to ask you a couple of questions about the matrix report entitled "Evaluation Case Planning and Management Strategy", which was referred to at the last hearing. There is a great deal of interest in questions surrounding the perceived crisis in the Department of Community Services [DOCS]. We would like to know why that report has been kept from the public arena. Could you tell me whether you will release that report?

Ms WESTACOTT: My understanding is that the report has been sent to the Parliamentary Library.

The Hon. R. S. L. JONES: It is available now?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

The Hon. R. S. L. JONES: That is excellent.

CHAIR: That is the matrix report?

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct. It was not intended to be a public document, but it has been sent to the Parliamentary Library.

The Hon. R. S. L. JONES: Information from the Supported Accommodation Assistance program [SAAP] shows that State wards make up 11 per cent of all clients of SAAP youth services. Other reports have estimated that State wards comprise up to 30 per cent of SAAP clients. Given that SAAP funding exists to provide services to the genuinely homeless and that Commonwealth and State protocols specifically forbid the use of SAAP money to house those already under some form of State responsibility, can you explain why State wards are being housed in SAAP services in obvious breach of the Commonwealth-State protocols? Is it not DOCS responsibility to look after children in its care, rather than seek to shift costs by placing State children in Commonwealth-funded services?

Ms WESTACOTT: It is my understanding that the New South Wales Government has special arrangements with the Commonwealth to provide substitute care places in some SAAP services. The use of SAAP services, as you know, is a matter for discussion in the Community Services Commissioner's report into substitute care. He recommends that there may be occasions where it is appropriate to use SAAP services. The Committee would appreciate how difficult it is on occasions to identify an appropriate placement for some children, particularly children with difficult and challenging behaviours. In some cases, SAAP services are considered to be appropriate forms of accommodation for those children. As I said, those arrangements are for specialist SAAP services and they are part of a particular agreement between the Commonwealth and the State. The Community Service Commissioner's own report validates that in some cases it may be appropriate to use SAAP services.

The Hon. R. S. L. JONES: I have no further questions at this time until I have looked at the answers to my questions.

CHAIR: I have a few questions I particularly want to put. The letter the Minister sent to us indicated that she was not going to provide further answers. We received the same letter from the Minister for Health. We suspected, but we are not certain, that this was organised and co-ordinated through the Cabinet Office, which would be the way in which the Government operates. You say that letter was not transmitted to the department?

Ms WESTACOTT: Not to my knowledge. As I said, I am aware of no instruction from the Minister's office to cease preparing answers to the questions.

CHAIR: I have a difficult question. I note that on 14 November the Minister is to become the Minister for Juvenile Justice as well as the Minister for Community Services, the Minister for Disability Services and so on. I ask this as an overarching question: Would there be a conflict for the Minister in having both of those functions, given the story in the *Sydney Morning Herald* today? How would that be overcome in government?

Ms WESTACOTT: Personally I am not aware that the Minister is going to be the Minister for Juvenile Justice.

CHAIR: It is in the gazette. She is taking over the responsibility because the Hon. Carmel Tebbutt will be unavailable.

Ms WESTACOTT: This is not uncommon in other States. In other States it is practice to have Juvenile Justice as part of the child protection and child welfare system. As you know, Juvenile Justice was originally part of Community Services in this State. There are basically two schools of thought. One is that one of the critical roles of government is to provide continuity of care, to understand the links between various systems and that some children might drift into the juvenile justice system. What is the correct response and what is the correct co-ordination that would prevent that from happening?

One school of thought says very clearly that if those agencies are under one portfolio and one Minister, there is a better opportunity to improve co-ordination between government agencies for early identification and detection of children who are at risk of being vulnerable or drifting into the juvenile justice system. Another school of thought—which I believe has triggered the original decision to remove the portfolios—is that Juvenile Justice is a justice function, not a welfare function. Looking at other States, the stronger view would be that Juvenile Justice is part of a welfare system, that it is a welfare function and that it is critical to providing continuity of care and to improving the co-ordination of government agencies.

CHAIR: I may be transgressing, but I am sure the Hon. R. D. Dyer will stop me if I am. A story appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* about an 11-year-old detainee who could not get bail because DOCS

could not provide appropriate housing. This matter would become a ministerial responsibility and the Minister would be torn between two agencies. What would be the best judgment call, so that there was not an obvious issue of conflict in that area? How would government bureaucracies deal with this matter?

Ms WESTACOTT: The first thing to say is that one case, as it is described in the paper this morning, does not of itself undermine the value and integrity of a system. So we cannot judge the effectiveness of a system based on one case. The second point to make—and this is how the bureaucracy would deal with it—is that that case shows, one, that it is difficult to find appropriate placements for children with challenging behaviour, and, two, that it has to be a top priority of government and of the bureaucracy to find appropriate and secure places for children with challenging behaviour. That requires an examination of the full range of accommodation options, which the Community Services Commissioner has outlined as well.

The options include re-examining the appropriateness of residential care, a limited use of the Supported Accommodation Assistance program, recruitment of specialist foster carers who are trained and capable of caring for children with high support needs and challenging behaviours and, as the Robert Fitzgerald report says, the creation and growth of specialist services. We are working with Juvenile Justice in a very co-ordinated way to improve our management of services for children who are vulnerable of drifting from the care and protection system into the juvenile justice system—who are indeed a very small percentage.

In particular, we are focusing on: early identification of people who are at risk; better case co-ordination between Juvenile Justice, DOCS, the police and other agencies, such as mental health; and building on a pre-initiative of DOCS, which is to fund intensive support services to the tune of \$11.8 million a year for children who have high support needs and particularly challenging behaviours. It is critical that the bureaucracy works together on these problems, because these issues are not for DOCS alone. These children receive services from a multiple set of agencies. Therefore, I do not see it as a conflict for the Minister to have those portfolios.

CHAIR: As the acting head of DOCS you would see it as a positive move for the Minister to have responsibility for Juvenile Justice as well as for the care of children?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes, I would. As I said, it is common in some other States. It is an opportunity for us to look at those issues of co-ordination and case management and early intervention and to really tackle this issue—which I think no-one is pretending is not a difficult issue—of finding appropriate placements for children with very difficult and challenging behaviour.

CHAIR: The question is asked whether any other State Ministers or New Zealand Ministers are supportive of the Minister's proposal to improve permanency of placement of children by adoption. I asked a question about the views of Professor Parkinson and Judy Cashmore, which you have answered by referring me to a web site. Obviously I cannot access that web site today. Would you paraphrase the general views of Professor Parkinson and Judy Cashmore, if that is possible?

Ms WESTACOTT: It would be inappropriate and it is difficult to paraphrase people's views and not then put some kind of judgment on them—and I do not want to mislead people with my own interpretation of them. Our response on permanency planning concerns have been that, whilst the Minister is committed to the principles of her bill, she is open to input and debate about whether specific provisions that she has put forward are the best way to achieve those principles. She has sought comment and input from the community and she will soon release a discussion paper to further refine that comment so that both in legislative terms and implementation terms we have input from experts such as Professor Parkinson and Judy Cashmore.

CHAIR: My understanding is that departmental documents prepared for the Minister are highly critical of the Minister's direction in this field?

Ms WESTACOTT: That is not correct. The department's document seeks to explain the Government's rational for wanting to move down the permanency planning route. It seeks to draw on overseas and international examples where other countries have taken this initiative as well and to draw out specific provisions of the bill. Indeed the discussion paper attempts to highlight some of the feedback that we have received in consultation to date, to put forward suggestions, and to identify some of the implementation issues which we all have to deal with in training to support of our staff. The department has been supportive of the Minister's direction—a direction that is being taken in other countries.

CHAIR: That is the appropriate function of the department. When will that discussion paper hit the deck?

Ms WESTACOTT: In the next three weeks.

CHAIR: When will the matter be debated?

Ms WESTACOTT: I would have to take that on notice. That is a matter for the Minister.

CHAIR: She promised it would be out early and debated in October. Is it your understanding that it is better not to put in too much detail in preparing documents for the Minister?

Ms WESTACOTT: Not at all. One of the issues that people are raising about permanency planning, if you take that as an example—

CHAIR: No, I mean generally, but permanency planning as an example?

Ms WESTACOTT: If I use that as an example, what people want to see is how something will be implemented and what resources will be put into it. So it is not a policy or good practice to be superficial about matters of such importance. It is critical that we outline to the community, our staff and our stakeholders the detail of how we would approach something so that people can be confident that those changes are going to be given effect and they understand the exact nature of the reform that is being proposed.

CHAIR: From what has been gleaned, would you say that Professor Parkinson and Judy Cashmore are supportive of the Minister's direction and the detail of the Minister's direction?

Ms WESTACOTT: They are supportive of the principles that the Minister has enunciated. They have expressed concern about the specific provisions and the best ways of achieving the Minister's objectives. Professor Parkinson's paper, to my recollection of it, made a very clear point that he supported the principles that the Minister was trying to achieve. Their comments go to the detail, and their views are now informing our further and detailed work. As I said, the Minister is committed to the principles but has sought advice from experts.

CHAIR: Do you think this Minister is capable of getting across such detail?

Ms WESTACOTT: I do, yes.

CHAIR: In your discussions with her do you think she understands the clear detail, can take them on board, and is able to put them into practice?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes, I do.

CHAIR: Can you give the clerk the date of release of the paper later so that we can include it at the end of the transcript, if possible?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Questions 24, 25 and 26 have not been answered.

Ms WESTACOTT: I thought they had been answered. I can give you answers to them individually.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Please provide details of the areas in which actual spending exceeded the projected spending, and by how much in each area. I hope to get some tabulation of that. Is that possible?

Ms WESTACOTT: I will go through it.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: It might be clear on the record if the Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans reads the text of his question and then Ms Westacott can respond.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: With reference to question 38 of the questions on notice answered by the Minister, that is to say the original question 38, during the Budget estimates hearing on 23 August 2000—page 13 of the transcript—Ms Niland stated that overspending in 1999-2000 was fully funded by

the Appropriation Bill, and it was fully funded. Please provide details of the areas in which actual spending exceeded the projected spending, and by how much in each area?

Ms WESTACOTT: I am happy to answer that. During the 1999-2000 financial year the department sought and received additional funding from Treasury in respect of a number of items. The additional \$22,175,000 included provision for the following: child support allowance, foster care, an additional \$10 million to meet the increased demand for services; award increases totalling \$6.1 million in respect of previous years' unfunded productivity award increases; workers compensation insurance premium of \$2 million to meet the shortfall between benchmark funding and actual premium calculations; and reversal of previous savings targets totalling \$4.075 million in respect of motor vehicles, staffing arrangements in group homes and productivity increases.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Could you supply that in writing?

Ms WESTACOTT: Certainly.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: With reference to question 39 of the questions on notice answered by the Minister, the response to 39(b) is "The \$22 million additional funding approved to the Department of Community Services in 1999-2000 increased foster care funding, resulting from increase in demand for growth and services; award increases; workers compensation insurance premium adjustment funding and motor vehicle cost increases."

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Could I ask, with respect, that the Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans read his question in a form that *Hansard* is able to actually transcribe?

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I am going to quickly, I am sorry, I assume—

Ms WESTACOTT: It is the same answer.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In relation to question 26—

Ms WESTACOTT: That question is still with the Minister.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: With reference to questions 41 and 47 of the questions on notice answered by the Minister, please provide the committee with: a copy of the staff exit survey report; trends in turnover; and exit survey outcomes. We still do not have that.

CHAIR: That matter has been prepared by the department and is in the Minister's office being checked for accuracy, is that correct?

Ms WESTACOTT: That is correct.

CHAIR: Does the Minister commonly check the department's answers for accuracy?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes, and that would be incumbent upon her to do so.

CHAIR: But what other methods does the Minister have, apart from her department, to check the accuracy of the department's information?

Ms WESTACOTT: She has her own advisors, and she has her history of previous appearances before the estimates committee, and she is entitled to question and ask for validation and scrutiny of the department.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If this is primary information in a survey exit form in which people leaving wrote why they were leaving, clearly that would then be collected, presumably in the most accurate form, possibly by some clerk within the department who was, presumably, collecting the statistics that were quantifiable and then taking a sample of remarks. Most survey forms have scope for elaboration of an individual response. My understanding of when someone is compiling a survey is that one finds remarks that are typical and quotes them literally. Why would the Minister have information to check up when, presumably, she did not have the primary information?

Ms WESTACOTT: I can only repeat the answer I have given: That question is with the Minister. It is a matter for her to release it to the Committee.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Yes, that sounds right. In question 27 I think there has been a mistake that I did not pick up in the question. The question as asked was, "With reference to question 43 of the Questions on Notice answered by the Minister, the Minister reported that \$31.6 million had been allocated to the Support for Families subprogram of the Child and Family Support program for 2000-2001, an increase of 23 per cent from 1999-2000. Question (a) What was the actual budget of the Support for Families subprogram of the Child Family Support program for 2000-2001?" That is incorrect. The year should be 1999-2000 because you cannot give the actual budget for 2000-01 because it has not happened yet. What I wanted to compare is the new budget to last year's actual budget, as opposed to last year's projected budget.

Ms WESTACOTT: Okay. Perhaps if I go to the answers and then try to get a better understanding of the issue you are raising. The 2000-01 budget allocation for the Support for Families subprogram of the Child and Family Support program is \$31.6 million. The 1999-2000 budget allocation for the same program was \$25.7 million, so the allocation in 2000-01 represents a 23 per cent increase.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I understand that. The point is that if the 1999-2000 budget was greatly increased in the actual spending then the increase in this budget is much less than the 23 per cent increase over what was needed because, presumably, what was actually spent was what was actually needed.

Ms WESTACOTT: You are seeking information on the projected expenditure for 1999-2000?

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: No, we know the projected expenditure for 1999-2000 and the projected expenditure for 2000-01. I want to know the actual expenditure for 1999-2000.

Ms WESTACOTT: I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You do not have the actual budget for that period?

Ms WESTACOTT: The \$31.6 million is a budget allocation.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Yes, I understand that.

Ms WESTACOTT: What you are seeking is information on expenditure. I would have to take that question on notice.

CHAIR: Are you seeking a breakdown of that expenditure, or are you seeking what the department actually spent?

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What it has actually spent. What happens in all these budgets is that if last year's budget expenditure was grossly low the actual expenditure then is exceeded by a large percentage, then this year the budget is often even less than was actually spent last year, yet claimed as a huge increase when in terms of the necessity of what was spent it is even a decrease or a minimal increase.

Ms WESTACOTT: I understand what you are—

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Obviously at some point it has been mistyped here, 2000-01, in the question.

Ms WESTACOTT: I understand what you are seeking, and that is what is the actual expenditure of 2000-01 for this program, which I have to take on notice.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: No, the actual expenditure for last year so that it can be compared to the budget allocation for 2000-01.

Ms WESTACOTT: Again, I would have to take that on notice.

CHAIR: Is it possible to get that to us this afternoon for that particular subitem?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Question 29, "With reference to question 46 of the Questions on Notice answered by the Minister, the response to question 46(f) states that 'the anticipated budget for contingencies is \$8.5 million' and that 'the budget is protected for any unanticipated growth' to what level is

the \$8.5 million protected?" The answer given was "It is all protected. The point is it is protected from any unanticipated growth." I ask: To what level is the \$8.5 million protected? If it is protected for unanticipated growth, it would exceed \$8.5 million. So to say that the \$8.5 million is protected seems an absurd answer. If you say we have \$8.5 million but we are protected for unanticipated growth, that will be in addition to the \$8.5 million?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes. To clarify that, the expenditure on contingencies—that is, unanticipated growth—is a protected item. The point of the answer was to say that the entire budget allocation for this item is protected, and is protected for unanticipated growth and demand.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In other words, the \$8.5 million is in it and the above \$8.5 million is also protected?

Ms WESTACOTT: That is right. Foster care allowances and contingencies are protected items in the budget.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In other words, theoretically they could go to infinity?

Ms WESTACOTT: Theoretically, yes; possibility, most unlikely.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Yes, of course.

Ms WESTACOTT: But the point I am making is that these are protected items in the budget for projected levels of growth and demand, and the point of our answer was that the contingencies is a protected item.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The answer that \$8.5 million is protected is not strictly correct, is it? That is obviously protected, but the increase in that is also protected.

Ms WESTACOTT: If we spent another \$500,000 that is related to growth and demand, then that is a protected item, that is funded by Treasury, yes.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The exceedences of \$8.5 million are also protected?

Ms WESTACOTT: Where they relate to changes in demand, yes.

CHAIR: What you really mean is that that \$8.5 million is quarantined specifically and that is one of the parts of the budget that you cannot jockey around?

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct. And if there are increases in demand that is also protected.

CHAIR: Treasury has said in a relatively open-handed way that it will pick up any overexpenditure in that area?

Ms WESTACOTT: These items have been traditionally protected items in the budget, and their protected status has not changed.

CHAIR: No, this is a separate issue. One is that the \$8.5 million is quarantined and cannot be used for any other purpose, right?

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct.

CHAIR: And if you do, you are very naughty. But if you exceed that amount you are saying that you can go back to Treasury for another bite?

Ms WESTACOTT: Where that is related to changes in demand, yes.

CHAIR: Has Treasury given you an outer limit on that? For example, if you said to Treasury, "We really need another \$14.5 million", which is possible, what would Treasury say then? Would it say, "Find it within your budget?"

Ms WESTACOTT: It would depend on the nature of the demand increase, and obviously we have not discussed that with Treasury because that is the allocation that we have been given, and it has traditionally been a protected item.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: With regard to question 31—

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Is it not clearly the case that a protected item is to cover unanticipated natural growth?

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: It does not mean that the coverage extends to an infinite degree?

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: If it were something that people regarded as being outside the ball park, to use an expression, Treasury might call for some explanation. However, all other things being equal, is it not the case that "protected item" means that the item will be one that Treasury will cover?

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct. And it relates to the growth in demand attributable to additional children coming into the system.

CHAIR: I understand that. So Treasury has given an indication that is not absolutely open ended, but within that project and that item Treasury is prepared to back you if there is an increase in demand, subject to your being able to report and have clear records. In those circumstances, Treasury will fund that increase?

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct.

CHAIR: But you have no idea how much that might be and what Treasury's liability is likely to be?

Ms WESTACOTT: That will depend upon whether there are changes in demand. It is early in the financial year.

CHAIR: I know that. Can Treasury come back to you and say, "Find it within your budget"? Or will Treasury say, "This will be in addition to what we have given you as your allocation this year"?

Ms WESTACOTT: It will depend upon the changes in demand and our capacity to report on those changes in demand. I think it would be premature for me to second-guess what Treasury's response is likely to be.

CHAIR: I am just trying to point out that although this is protected spending, and although you can go back to Treasury and say, "We have spent more of this money," that does not mean that Treasury cannot come back and say, "Look, we have given you another \$28 million in your whole budget this year. Find it within your budget." Could Treasury say that?

Ms WESTACOTT: Theoretically, Treasury could, but it has not in the past. Traditionally it has funded—

CHAIR: So you could rely on the fact that Treasury would in fact increase your spending in this particular item area?

Ms WESTACOTT: Subject to our being able to demonstrate that the increase is related to an increase in demand.

CHAIR: That was just to clarify the matter.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I think that is about as clarified an answer we are going to get. With regard to question 31, which relates to stolen laptops, question 48 was a question on notice answered by the Minister. The response to question 48 (a) referred to the response provided to question 12, General, which stated that all reporting of lost or stolen properties is undertaken within guidelines and according

to appropriate insurance requirements. I understand that the guidelines may have been followed. Please specify how many laptop computers have been lost or stolen or are missing? Are district officers with laptop computers travelling with, and/or taking home confidential files—both hard and soft copies—that contain personal and confidential information about children, young people and families? Further, what would happen if those files were lost, or the laptop was stolen from a vehicle? How practical is the provision of laptop computers that contain very personal and confidential information? The reply was that last financial year 16 were lost or stolen and that they are not networked and therefore do not contain confidential client information. Surely, if one were working on a file, one would download the confidential information and keep it in the file.

Ms WESTACOTT: Downloaded into a floppy disk?

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Download it onto either a floppy disk or, more readily, the hard disk of the laptop. Then presumably one would write in any additions or extra memorandums and then feed that back to the file when logging back in again. Otherwise, there would not be much point in having a laptop with you, would there?

Ms WESTACOTT: The purpose of having a laptop is for the person out in the field to have remote access to the main system of the department, to get client information. If someone's laptop is stolen, that access is not available. The information is protected by password, which controls access to client information and sensitive data.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Are you saying that the laptops are effectively used as dumb terminals?

Ms WESTACOTT: They are used by people to do their own work, principally to allow people who are not in their office to get access to the system. They might be at home and dial in to get remote access to information. If the laptop were stolen, that capacity to dial in and get access to the system is not available to whoever stole the laptop.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But, presumably, some of those files would be downloaded, then the person would write in confidential information, and the file would be updated later. All of that would not be done on line, surely.

Ms WESTACOTT: I am not sure how someone would download from an information base. I am happy to take that matter on notice. All these systems are protected by password and access requirements. There are strict guidelines for the use of laptops and the use of client information. I am happy to take that on notice and to come back to you on how that might happen. But these people are dialling in and using password.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So if they are not logged on to the main frame, they are using the laptop. Is that right?

Ms WESTACOTT: To my knowledge, no. In terms of confidential client information, their access is to the database. So, in terms of the laptop, it would not contain that information. They would not be downloading onto their laptop.

CHAIR: So this is the antediluvian system to which the director-general referred. How close are we to getting a new post-diluvian system, or a new wave?

Ms WESTACOTT: The first stage of the enhanced client information system will roll out in December with the introduction of the DOCS helpline, which will see the enhancement of the new risk assessment tools. The second phase of the overhaul of the client information system will roll out in March next year. We are currently testing the system and testing the software that has been purchased, and we will be undertaking substantial training.

CHAIR: Have you transferred all your database to the new Post Word? The previous database, as I understand, was pre Word, was it not?

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct. We have not transferred the data to the new system yet because we are testing the new software that has been purchased. That will happen in February. As I said, the first stage of the new enhancement system will operate from December when the helpline, as it is called, will come on line.

CHAIR: I should clarify that the Hon. R. S. L. Jones is present in accordance with the forms of paragraph 10 of the resolution of 13 May 1999 establishing the General Purpose Standing Committees, and he was a substitute member of the Committee on Wednesday 23 August 2000 during the asking of the questions to which this meeting relates.

The Hon. R. S. L. JONES: In your response to my question 9 there is reference to the "Revised Interagency Guidelines for Child Protection Intervention". Is it possible for the Committee to have a copy of those revised guidelines?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

The Hon. R. S. L. JONES: You talk about the new DOCS client system assisting in the co-ordination of data collection.

Ms WESTACOTT: That was the system to which I was referring when I was responding to the Chair.

CHAIR: Could we have that information?

Ms WESTACOTT: We can give you that information. I have indicated previously that the first part rolls out with the helpline in December and the next part rolls out in March.

CHAIR: Could we have that in precis form this afternoon?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

CHAIR: Just the documentation.

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

CHAIR: Quite a few of your responses to questions asked by the Hon. R. S. L. Jones refer to a couple of DOCS papers "Towards Better Service" and "Looking After Children". Are those documents publicly available?

Ms WESTACOTT: "Towards Better Service" is publicly available. "Looking After Children" is a management system we are purchasing to improve management. We can give the Committee some information about that system.

CHAIR: If that could be put into the Parliamentary Library, that would be adequate for our purposes, would it not?

The Hon. R. S. L. JONES: Yes, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: If those documents are available in the Parliamentary Library members could have access to them. That does not require a response this afternoon.

The Hon. R. S. L. JONES: You refer in your response to a data match between the Department of Community Services and the Department of Juvenile Justice to determine the number of State wards under Department of Juvenile Justice supervision. You say that currently 31 are State wards, seven are subject to other care orders and that 21 are former State wards. Are you certain those figures would be fairly accurate, or could the actual figures be wildly different?

Ms WESTACOTT: They have been obtained from data matching so I think their accuracy is pretty well assured. Also they are consistent: we did a data match at one point and a data match at another point, and the figures were consistent.

CHAIR: Can you give me an idea of the precise procedures that operate when a State ward comes into the care of the juvenile justice system? If someone is arrested, what are the procedures? Are the police in contact with the department? How do the police know that the young person is a State ward anyway?

Ms WESTACOTT: I will ask Carol to answer that question.

Ms PELTOLA: We have a protocol with the police whereby they contact DOCS officers as soon as a young person who is a ward is arrested or being questioned by the police. We then provide whatever support that young person might need, whether that is accommodation or some other form of support in the normal way that a parent would for a child.

The Hon. R. S. L. JONES: Would DOCS be contacted in all cases when a State ward comes into contact with the police?

Ms PELTOLA: That is the normal protocol between us and the police. Sometimes young people might give incorrect names, so there could be occasions when it might not be clear that the young person is a ward.

The Hon. R. S. L. JONES: How will this new project officer assist with things such as that?

Ms PELTOLA: Essentially there was a report which looked at an action plan between the Department of Community Services and the Department of Juvenile Justice [JJ]. We are already taking action to implement that. So, our Area Directors have been meeting over the past 12 months or so with their equivalent in the Department of Juvenile Justice. Essentially they are looking at some of the practical considerations. For example, that we know when a ward who might be in a JJ facility is about to be released in enough time for us to have a placement available for that young person.

Obviously, if we only find out that day it is very difficult for us to find an appropriate placement. It is those kinds of practical things that need to be working. The central office provides a way of co-ordinating this by making sure that we document appropriate procedures between ourselves and Juvenile Justice. But essentially what we are looking for is on the ground making sure that relationship works. Ms Westacott talked about some of those activities in different departments. So we need to make sure that we co-ordinate them as thoroughly as possible.

CHAIR: I picked up the *Sydney Morning Herald* this morning and there was an article which was highly critical of this particular matter, that is, the co-ordination between people in care and the number of children in care, and who are the responsibility of the department, who end up in the juvenile justice system. But I am drawn also to the concern expressed to me on a number of occasions about the large number of those children who are associated with prostitution and the actions by the department in ensuring that those children under care do not end up in child prostitution rings or prostituting themselves. I appreciate it is an issue of case management, but what is the problem when it keeps arising?

Ms WESTACOTT: The critical thing is about co-ordination between the range of agencies involved in looking after children, not just DOCS, and to identify children through the police system as well as through the juvenile justice system who are coming into contact with child prostitution or drug use.

CHAIR: When they are in the system are they not the responsibility of DOCS no matter what? I am referring specifically to the answer to question 9, which was originally asked by the Hon. A. G. Corbett, followed by the Hon. R. S. L. Jones. The issue is that although they are wards of the State, using the old term, no matter that they end up in prison or in police hands, they are still the responsibility of DOCS, is that not true?

Ms WESTACOTT: That is true and that is why we are investing so much time, energy and resources into reforming the out of home care system and improving our relationship with other agencies through the interagency guidelines that support the new care and protection Act and through our work in providing counselling services to children with high support needs. Yes, they are our responsibility and we are taking very seriously the need for reform for the out of home care system and putting in place a lot of changes to improve our service, but I think it is critical that DOCS cannot do this on its own. It must work with other agencies because those other agencies—such as the police, Health or Juvenile Justice—may be the entry point for a child. It is absolutely critical that we have the protocols Ms Petola has been talking about.

CHAIR: That would be a lot of children as well as your own particular wards. I know there are other kids who also get caught up in prostitution and the like, and they are the responsibility of their parents or whomever, but I am talking about the wards of the State where DOCS has a particular responsibility in looking after these particular children. Why do I still hear of and read stories about wards of the State, and this particular story about children in detention not being able to find housing and so are using the detention centre as a de facto housing arrangement?

Ms WESTACOTT: We have said today that it is difficult to find placements for some children with very challenging behaviour.

CHAIR: Is the detention centre an appropriate place for them?

Ms WESTACOTT: I think we would agree it is not an appropriate place, but some of these children are very difficult to place. They have been in and out of services, they have burnt their bridges with a number of providers. It is critical but we are now working with JJ and the police to identify and use the community services commissioner's report into out of home care to build on the services that we have available, in particular to try to create specialist support services for children with particularly challenging and difficult behaviours. It is a difficult issue confronting our organisation but it is important that we are talking about very small numbers of wards in the juvenile justice system.

CHAIR: How many?

Ms WESTACOTT: It would be 2.5 per cent.

CHAIR: How many people is that?

Ms WESTACOTT: About 8,000.

CHAIR: That has been given elsewhere in answers.

Ms WESTACOTT: We gave the answer in detail. Of the 2,345 young people in the Department of Juvenile Justice 31 were current State wards, seven were subject to other court orders and 21 were former State wards. That is a very low number of people within the JJ system, of wards in the department's services.

CHAIR: How many wards do you have?

Ms PELTOLA: In the care system we have more than 8,000 children, but less than half of those are actually wards.

CHAIR: So you have 80 or 90 kids in the juvenile justice system who are either under your care directly or you are partly responsible for or used to be responsible for, 31, plus whatever numbers you have given. Is that what you are saying?

Ms WESTACOTT: There are 31 who are current State wards, seven subject to other care orders and 21 former State wards

CHAIR: How many people are in the juvenile justice system at the moment?

Ms WESTACOTT: There are 2,345.

CHAIR: All of your 8,000 wards?

Ms PELTOLA: If I can correct that, 8,000 are not wards; 8,000 are in our out of home care system.

CHAIR: How many are State wards?

Ms PELTOLA: Approximately less than half. We would have to take provision of the exact number on notice.

CHAIR: Would that be 4,000 or thereabouts?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes, and obviously that varies depending on the courts and the release of children from the care system.

CHAIR: If they are under your care how do you relate to them when they are in the juvenile justice system. Do you go out and pay bail for them if they are picked up by the police or if they are caught in the juvenile justice system? Are you responsible for their bail as I would be for my own children perhaps?

Ms PELTOLA: We exercise those parental responsibilities. Obviously on occasions magistrates may refuse bail, but where the child needs to be placed, we would seek to return that child to his or her normal placement. On occasions foster carers are not willing to have the child returned to them if he or she has committed, or is alleged to have committed, a criminal offence. We then need to look for an alternative placement. It is on those occasions, as you would understand, that on very short notice, if the foster carers are unwilling to have the child home, it is difficult to find a new placement.

CHAIR: Returning to the numbers, previous answers stated that 4 per cent of juvenile justice kids are State wards yet you said the figure was 2.5 per cent.

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct.

CHAIR: I understand there is an accounting difference. What is that difference?

Ms WESTACOTT: Can you clarify that question, please?

CHAIR: The figure of 4 per cent of juvenile justice children being State wards yet the deputy director-general said the figure was 2.5 percent. It is an accounting thing?

Ms WESTACOTT: The figure is 2.5 percent of people in the juvenile justice system are State wards. Of State wards 3.9 percent are in the juvenile justice system.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Dealing with the relationship between wards of the State and prostitution, the answer to Question 21 states that no reports or citations have been developed to specifically address State wards and prostitution. This link has been known at least since 1986 and probably long before that. Why has the department not investigated this issue?

Ms WESTACOTT: The department has taken action to deal with the potential for children getting into child prostitution. One of our key services, which I mentioned in our answer, was our Kings Cross adolescent service, which has a strong relationship with police and other agencies in the Kings Cross area. Children might come into contact with those agencies, which try to divert those children and reunite them with their families or get them into a proper care program. We have outlined a number of other initiatives in the answer to the question. We are trying to come up with a holistic response to the needs of children in the care and protection system because children are vulnerable to a multiple of things. They might be vulnerable to child prostitution and to drug use, so to try to focus on one of those issues only and have a separate program would add to fragmentation when in fact many of these children who are at the very difficult end of the care and protection system might have multiple problems. They may be using drug and alcohol excessively and they might be also engaged in child prostitution. To just take one part of what is a quite complex set of service requirements for some of these children would probably just lead to fragmentation.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: However, it would be true that not all State wards would enter into prostitution.

Ms WESTACOTT: Absolutely not.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: What is it about these kids who end up becoming prostitutes that is different from other kids?

Ms WESTACOTT: I am not sure that I can answer that question here. That would require a substantial piece of research, interviewing those children and getting some information about the difference. I cannot say here with any authority that these are the differences between those children.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Has there been research into this?

Ms WESTACOTT: I would have to take that question on notice.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Because the answer would seem to imply that there have been no reports or even citations to reports that those areas have been looked into. It is part of the responsibility of the department to narrow down why some kids are going off in this direction so that something can be done about it.

Ms WESTACOTT: I will take on notice the issue of whether there has been research done. There may be international research, however, I re-emphasise that one of our responsibilities is to look at the whole life

needs of a child and their vulnerabilities across a whole range of areas. Many of these children have multiple and complex needs, and to look at one area and to focus on that may in fact distort the fact that these children are coming into a number of a risk areas.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: You are saying that child prostitution is one risk area?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Alcohol and drug abuse is another risk area?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: They tend to go together, do they not?

Ms WESTACOTT: I have no evidence to make that assertion here but I think our job is to make sure that the full needs of a child are addressed in the care and protection system.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: The answer to question 36 referred to a number of children requiring a field response by the Department of Community Services [DOCS] and an estimate that 70 to 80 per cent of the children who apparently require a field response by DOCS actually get it. What happens to the other 20 to 30 per cent of kids who require a field response but who do not obviously receive one?

Ms WESTACOTT: There will be a number of reasons why we may not go and visit a child. For example, I think the director-general gave the example at the last meeting of this Committee that if a child is in hospital and is being cared for by the hospital system, it would be an inappropriate use of our resources to make contact with that family and visit that child. Similarly, if a child has been relocated to other relatives and is out of the risk situation, it is appropriate for us not to visit that child and not to have direct contact. There will be a number of circumstances where it is a correct assessment not to actually visit that child because they may well be cared for by a hospital, or by another government agency, or they may be with relatives and therefore out of the at-risk situation.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Certainly that would apply to a percentage of children but it would be the case that some children would miss out because of demands on staff, there not being staff to go around?

Ms WESTACOTT: I think it is critical to say that all cases that come into the Department of Community Services are assessed, by a district officer and an assistant manager—that is two levels of assessment—and all cases are recorded on the client information system. All agencies, be they police or other parts of government, have to prioritise their work. They have to assess cases based on their priority and level of severity, and it is appropriate for us to do that. New South Wales has one of the widest definitions of notification in Australia. That means that many reports come in—over 70,000 a year—and it is critical for the department to prioritise those cases and deal with the most serious cases first. All organisations have to match their work force with the cases on hand and give a thorough assessment of the level of risk and need and allocate the resources accordingly.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Are you telling me that no child who needs to have a field response will not get that field response?

Ms WESTACOTT: As I said, all cases are assessed; if a field response is required as part of that assessment, then the department would provide the resources to ensure that that field response occurred.

CHAIR: Within what sort of time frame?

Ms WESTACOTT: That is the issue. It depends on the level of seriousness. For example, if a child had moved that evening to a relative's house, it is appropriate for the department to prioritise that case and conduct the visit at a later time. There are some cases that require immediate field response, within 24 hours, because of the level of seriousness of the information that has been made available to us. In other cases it is appropriate, based on the level of risk and the level of assessed need, for us to prioritise that case and conduct a visit and detailed assessment at a later time.

CHAIR: They should be assessed and if they are assessed as needing a field person, is there a guideline that says it should be done within 24 hours?

Ms WESTACOTT: At the present time management reviews each of those cases and sets an appropriate time frame. Under the new Act that is coming in later this year and under our new assessment tool, we will actually be categorising cases and assigning times.

CHAIR: So we will start to see some benchmarking, which is what I have requested in the last three estimates hearings. Following the legislation and the drawing up of the regulations, by this time next year will we have some benchmark and judgment about whether the benchmarks are being achieved in what percentage of cases?

Ms WESTACOTT: I understand the question. First, the introduction of our helpline will assist in that benchmarking process because there will be one central point of intake for all child protection matters, which means one consistent form of assessment. As you would appreciate with benchmarking, when there is inconsistency it is very difficult to benchmark a community service centre or to benchmark New South Wales with other States. The helpline will enable us to improve our benchmarking capacity by having one point of entry for the agency. The second reform we are introducing is to tighten up risk assessment and categorise according to the level of risk, and assign a required response time. Again, that enables us to improve our benchmarking.

Another thing I should mention is that we agreed recently at the meeting of State Ministers for community services to participate in a national benchmarking exercise with other States, starting with Queensland and Victoria. I have already had some initial introductions with the director-general in Queensland about how we might benchmark with other States. I believe that the changes we are making to both our client information system and our new risk assessment tools, and the introduction of a new central intake point, will enable us to do the benchmarking that you have been seeking.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Just on the discussions that have been taking place with Queensland and Victoria, it would be very important to have a consistent approach because of the mobility of many of these families.

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct. Many families are transient and information might come into the system at multiple points. One advantage of the helpline is that information will come through a single point and be recorded on the system. If I am at Dareton at the community services centre and a relative has rung from Queensland, that information will have come in through our telephone service centre. I will be looking at the client information system and I will see that we have other information about that child from another source or another State, and I will be able to build up a full picture of the case and make my assessment accordingly.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Is there legislation which provides for privacy?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes. One issue we now have to sort out with the other States as we progress benchmarking is privacy and confidentiality. Clearly, benchmarking is critical for an agency like the Department of Community Services [DOCS], but it has to be benchmarking within our service system, between similar service systems in other States and between non-government providers.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You said there were about 70,000 notifications. In answer to question 36 you have said that 32,074 required a field response, and of those requiring a field response 70 per cent to 80 per cent required and received direct contact from a DOCS officer. Presumably the estimate that 70 per cent to 80 per cent required and received direct contact is based on the data analysis of children recorded as having an interview. Obviously the data is not precise because you have said, "70 – 80%". If there were precise numbers in your system of who had had an interview, presumably you would not make an estimate of "70 – 80%". Based on data analysis you would say 72.3 per cent of 32,074. Presumably you do not have a precise number of who had an interview; you cannot give a precise number.

Ms WESTACOTT: I will have to take it on notice whether we are able to give a precise number. Certainly, at the previous estimates committee hearing the figure of 70 per cent to 80 per cent was given of children recorded as having an interview. In terms of whether or not we can give 72.5 per cent, I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In a sense you have not in that it is an estimate based on a data analysis. I suppose it is the scientist in me that says that that sounds like an awfully imprecise figure. In paragraph (b) you state:

Of the children where an interview was not recorded, 16% were the subject of a subsequent S.22 Notification within 12 months.

How can you give a precise figure of 16 per cent based on an imprecise figure of 70 per cent to 80 per cent?

Ms WESTACOTT: Because we are recording two things. We are recording re-notification, and we would be able to record accurately whether that family or child had had an interview at the previous notification.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If you have accurate records of previous interviews, why can you only give me an estimate?

Ms WESTACOTT: As I said, I take that question on notice.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But you can see my point about inconsistency.

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes, I understand the point.

[Short adjournment]

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I refer to question No. 32, with reference to question 49 of the Questions on Notice answered by the Minister. The response to question 49 referred to a survey of clients that was "conducted in relation to the work of the court liaison officer at Worimi". Please provide the Committee with the survey results. The answer states that the evaluation of the survey refers to positive and negative aspects of the court liaison officer position. The answer states, "This is an evaluation of the survey." Could you provide the survey result, and not the evaluation of the survey?

Ms WESTACOTT: We have not answered the question, though.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Is there necessarily a difference? Surely, the results and an evaluation can be one and the same thing.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It is unlikely. Survey results are raw data, and evaluation of a survey is—

CHAIR: Thin data.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Yes. That is a view that one might take. In order to be sure that the Chair is totally wrong in saying that the evaluation is thin, it would be nice to obtain the primary data.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: It must be said, however, that the question states: "Please provide the Committee with the survey results." There is no reference to "raw data".

CHAIR: In support of what the Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans has said, the survey results are the results of the survey, that is, what comes in. But what the department has provided is the evaluation and the summary of all of that. The Committee would like to be told how many people raised certain issues. For example, the Committee would like to know how many clients raised issues relating to staff stress reduction, or expectation of the staff to be on call at all times, et cetera. I think the Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans is concerned about who made these points. Is that right?

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Yes.

Ms WESTACOTT: I will take that on notice. I do not have a problem about giving the information about broad percentages, but if there is anything in the survey that breaches confidentiality or—

CHAIR: I understand that.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: A sociological survey is largely a series of written questions with written answers that are not extremely quantified, or is it a tick-box system which asks "Were you satisfied, dissatisfied, or whatever"?

Ms WESTACOTT: I do not know the answer to the question, but I am happy to take it on notice. If the information can be provided in statistical, meaningful ways, that is, X per cent of people, I am happy to provide that. If it is more a qualitative focus group—

CHAIR: That is not likely to be able to be done today?

Ms WESTACOTT: No. That will have to be done at a later point.

CHAIR: Perhaps it may be worthwhile if that could be forwarded to the Committee at your convenience, hopefully within 35 days if that is possible.

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

CHAIR: Of course. The other option is for the Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans to put that on the notice paper in that form. If you could take it on notice and provide it to the Committee within 35 days, I would be happy with that.

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes, that is fine.

CHAIR: Would you prefer that?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes. I will certainly provide it within 35 days, but if we can be clear about the kind of information we are looking for, that will assist us obviously to fast track it.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: This is as clear as we are going to get it without intervention through the parliamentary system. Do you want me to rewrite it and put it through the parliamentary system?

Ms WESTACOTT: No, I am happy to provide it. My understanding of what you are seeking is: Do we have a summary of the survey results which shows the weighting given to these questions? If we do, I am happy to provide that. If it is more a qualitative survey—and I am not familiar with the survey—it would be difficult to provide the information in that form. We will, within 35 days, first describe how the survey was conducted and in what form and, second, provide whatever statistical data we can provide.

CHAIR: That would be perfect. Obviously, this is a quality control, quality assessment document, is it not?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Question 33 also relates to question 49 of the Questions on Notice. Three areas—Blacktown, Campbelltown and Worimi—are using court liaison officers. As your response refers only to a survey of clients at Worimi, first, have the conclusions of the Worimi survey been extrapolated and applied to clients in Blacktown and Campbelltown; and second, how valid are the concerns of the Worimi survey for clients using the Blacktown and Campbelltown services? The answer is no, meaning that the conclusions of the Worimi survey have not been extrapolated; and, second, the conclusions of the Worimi survey cannot be applied for clients using the Blacktown and Campbelltown services, in view of the differences in these areas and the different client base.

Obviously, if this is a new administrative initiative, the fact that the clients are using slightly different services and that the client base is different might not mean that the fact that there was an extra person associated with the courts was not a valuable thing despite regional differences. If the conclusions of the Worimi survey cannot be extrapolated, is there any data on the success of the Blacktown and Campbelltown services?

Ms WESTACOTT: I will have to take that on notice.

CHAIR: That should be either a yes or no answer, should it not? Therefore, could you provide that this afternoon?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes, certainly.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In the sense that you have said that the conclusions of the Worimi survey cannot be extrapolated, there would have to be a separate survey, would there not?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

CHAIR: The question might be: Are there any plans to collect such data?

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct. Or: Have there been or are there any plans?

CHAIR: That could be a yes or no answer?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes. I will provide that this afternoon.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS The answer to question 34 implies that there are problems having court liaison officers where there is not a single court. Does that mean that the court liaison officer goes to various courts? What does it mean in practice?

Ms WESTACOTT: It is my understanding that where there is not a single court two things happen: first, we have to rely more on individual officers to present cases and, second, the court liaison officers have to travel between courts. The benefit of having a central and single point is slightly diminished by them having to operate across a number of jurisdictions.

CHAIR: Question 35 has been assessed; it has been answered. I return to question 14, which refers to the number of wards in juvenile detention centres and the wards in care project. In answer to the Hon. R. S. L. Jones you stated that under the action plan recommended by the wards in care project a match of client records held by DOCS and the Department of Juvenile Justice of children and young persons who are State wards in juvenile detention centres will be undertaken.

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct.

CHAIR: That means that the figures you gave before could be seen to be fairly rubbery. If you knew that match you would not have to undertake such a study, would you?

Ms WESTACOTT: No, my understanding is that first of all we have performed five data matches between DOCS and the Department of Juvenile Justice information systems. My understanding of the question is: Are we going to continue this practice? The answer is yes, and we are going to do it on a quarterly basis so that we can continue to track children in both systems. Yes, we have performed that kind of data match and yes, we intend to perform it again.

CHAIR: Has DOCS carried out any studies that reveal the drift of wards or children in care to adult prisons after they cease to be wards?

Ms WESTACOTT: Not that I am aware of. I will take that on notice.

CHAIR: Would you expect the gathering of that information to shape the provision of after-care services?

Ms WESTACOTT: I think a range of things would shape it.

CHAIR: Are the after-care services a function of DOCS or DJJ?

Ms WESTACOTT: A function of DOCS, and we have increased our funding to \$2.7 million this year to provide enhanced leaving and after-care services. There are a number of things we have to take into account in judging the success of the care system. One is educational containment and another is the high-risk end of the business, when children end up in the juvenile justice system. The reasons that people drift into the criminal justice system are complex and varied. We need to look at the whole range of things that say this has been a successful intervention on behalf of the child, of which there would be multiple factors, including health status, educational status and the whole concept of their wellbeing and that is part of the reform of out-of-home care.

We want to be able to measure those things in both the long and the short term in the longitudinal sense. The reason people end up in the criminal justice system is vastly more complex. Certainly, it is one of the factors if you are conducting a longitudinal analysis, but a number of things happen to people which trigger their entry into the criminal justice system.

CHAIR: Yes, but in the same way many parents of my generation would say, "You kids never leave home". That has been the experience of many of my friends. Yet for DOCS in some cases it all finishes when

they are 18, or 16 in some cases. Within the department is there a feeling towards an ongoing attitude for concern? For example, if a child is adopted under the Minister's new proposals, the responsibility will be past the age of 21 or 18. That is why I asked the question about wards of the State who may be never be part of the juvenile justice system whilst they are wards but become part of the adult process later. Is there any proposal by government or the department to look into that issue?

Ms WESTACOTT: The department is looking at how we can make it easier for ex-wards to contact us and get information about their history, their life story. Part of that technique is the life story book about what has happened to them over a period.

CHAIR: If they try to contact the person previously responsible for them, for example, the department or the caseworker, do your funds provide for that?

Ms WESTACOTT: It is a service that we currently provide through our client feedback line. Ex-wards can contact that line and ask for information through the information exchange system.

CHAIR: If they ask for support or fatherly or motherly care and concern, is that something you currently provide?

Ms WESTACOTT: Not currently, but we are looking at options to improve our services to ex-wards and people who want to find information and get some form of counselling or assistance. Indeed, it is a comment that the Community Services Commissioner made in his report about the need for services to be provided to people for a certain time. The second thing we would want to do, if the Government supports such an initiative, is to look after the children case management systems so that we can collect and retain for a time information about movement between places and key information about someone's life. That information will then be easily accessible as opposed to trying to find a hard copy file which may or may not have the relevant information that is sought.

CHAIR: Unless you have that outcome study about what happens to them after they turn 18, what you do may have to be varied and what you do may not be in the best interests of the child.

Ms PELTOLA: Dr Judy Cashmore has an ongoing study of wards leaving care. She has a small sample that she is following through. She reinterviews those people, who are no longer young, as they get older. We certainly use that as a way of ensuring that we modify our care system. I also point out that whilst DOCS is not formally involved with young people, many have been in foster care and their foster carers continue to provide the motherly and fatherly support that you asked about.

CHAIR: That is true, but in terms of the department knowing about that and modifying what it does, your advice to prospective adopters or foster parents could vary over time if they had that information.

Ms WESTACOTT: That is one of the critical reasons we purchased the looking-after-care system: to try to gather that information and use it to form future directions in our out-of-home care project to assist people to track information about their lives and provide some leaving and after-care services

CHAIR: Can a parole officer access that information?

Ms WESTACOTT: No.

CHAIR: With the approval of a person?

Ms WESTACOTT: With approval, yes.

CHAIR: So you have made it easier for them to access their own documents should they need to?

Ms WESTACOTT: Correct.

CHAIR: Has anyone carried out a survey or had a conference at which people who were wards of the State and are now aged 20, 35, or 50 give their views on how things can be improved? Now that they are mature, have gone through life experiences and can look back, they may have something to add?

Ms WESTACOTT: Not to my knowledge, but that is a commendable idea. One of the key platforms of our reform of out-of-home care has to be what outcomes we are seeking for the children and young people from the system and how to measure that, given that some of those outcomes have to be measured over a long time.

CHAIR: There must be examples of enormous success, not just emotional success but success in the area of jobs and the like. There must also be some great failures. However, there must be a range of people in the middle. How do we know whether what you are doing works for the kids concerned or whether it is simply for the comfort of the department?

Ms WESTACOTT: We know from the work of the Community Services Commission this year that there are some positive findings in relation to children who are currently in the system. Sixty-six per cent of participants thought that they were better off in foster care; 86 per cent felt that they were treated as part of a family; 76 per cent reported that they were happy at school; and 66 per cent commented favourably on their progress at school. So we know that, within the current system, there are some positive results about and some positive trends towards the success of the present care and protection system. What you are talking about is a longer term study about long-term impacts—something that we can consider as part of our reform of out-of-home care.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Was that a survey of 100 per cent of children?

Ms WESTACOTT: The survey to which I have just referred, which was conducted by the Community Services Commission, involved some focus groups on children.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So it was not a comprehensive survey? It was not a 100 per cent survey?

Ms WESTACOTT: It covered a substantial number of children. I did not conduct the survey; it was conducted by the Community Services Commission. However, the point I am trying to make is that some positive trends were revealed relating to current children in the system. The Chair was talking about the long-term outcomes that we are achieving for children. As part of our reform to out-of-home care we are keen to measure those outcomes. That is why I think Dr Cashmore's study is critical.

CHAIR: I am pleased with your answer. However, in answer to paragraphs (c) and (d) of question No. 14, which was asked by the Hon. R. S. L. Jones, you said:

An audit to determine the number of State wards who have ever been in a juvenile detention centre whilst in the care of the Department of Community Services, will not be conducted.

From time to time you inquire about how many State wards are in juvenile detention centres. However, the Hon. R. S. L. Jones asked you to determine how many wards or children in DOCS care end up in a juvenile justice establishment?

Ms WESTACOTT: Our decision is based on what is the best use of our resources. Do we conduct that audit, or do we assess the needs of children who are currently in the care and protection system to ensure that they are getting the right sorts of services and access to the services that they need? The department is not stating that it cannot conduct that audit. It can conduct that audit. However, it is a matter of prioritising resources. We believe that the best use of resources would be to focus on assessing the support needs of children and forming individual case plans rather than to conduct an audit to determine how many of them have ever been in the juvenile justice system.

CHAIR: Someone who has been in the juvenile justice system might well become a ward as a result of some transgression or something that happens, and an inquiry is undertaken. For example, a child might be released back to the department rather than back to his or her family. A quality assessment could then be made to determine, first, whether that was not a path into a juvenile justice system and, second, whether children became juvenile justice detainees during the time that they were wards. If such an audit revealed that that number was 60 per cent, that would be a worrying percentage. I am referring to those children who, whilst wards, became juvenile justice detainees. One would have to have pretty serious problems to be made a juvenile justice detainee. It would be of significance to see whether what you are doing works.

Ms WESTACOTT: The wards project and the action plan, which we have talked about a number of times in this Committee, recommend research into the relationship between care history and justice involvements so we can identify people who are potentially at risk. So the issue really is: What is the best way in which to answer the question that you have just asked? Is it an audit or is it an assessment of a young person's needs and an assessment of his or her relationship with the juvenile justice system?

CHAIR: The difficulty we are facing involves individual case studies versus systemic response. If, for whatever reason, 60 per cent of State wards or children under the care and protection of the Minister end up in the juvenile justice system, that would be a worrying figure.

Ms WESTACOTT: We have agreed and we plan to implement a regular quarterly review of the number of children in the juvenile justice system who are also wards.

CHAIR: It could be the same 2 per cent every month or it could be, say, 10 per cent, just rotating every couple of years.

Ms WESTACOTT: Although it should show trends if that figure starts to move in any direction.

CHAIR: It does not show recidivism. It does not show that one child is counted on six different surveys.

Ms WESTACOTT: That is the individual case planning that I am talking about. We believe that our resources are best placed in looking at and assessing the needs of an individual and saying, "This child has been in a juvenile detention centre three times."

CHAIR: If you look at the minutiae you might not get to what might be a system failure. You might end up with a good reason for each child being in a juvenile justice centre. If you establish that only a small number of children keep offending, that is different. If you find that a large number of individuals end up in the juvenile justice system—it could be 30 per cent of those who have been under care for 10 years—it could be quite worrying. It could mean a system failure or a need to change the way in which you are doing things. Do you understand what I am saying?

Ms WESTACOTT: I understand what you are saying.

CHAIR: Information which has just come to hand from the Community Services Commission shows that more than one-third of children in care end up in a juvenile detention centre. That information was revealed in an article today in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which is why I refer again to this issue. How many of those children actually entered the care system because they went to prison? Perhaps the reason they went to prison was that they had become wards.

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes. How do you most meaningfully collect information of that sort? Do you conduct an audit, or do you try to get other information? You want to know two things: First, at any given time how many children who are wards or who are in the care and protection system are in the juvenile justice system? Second, how many of those children are frequently going in and out of that system? We are not saying that we will not conduct such an audit. We specifically said that we would do that audit, but we also said that, through our project, we will look at the best way of assessing the relationship between the care and protection system and the juvenile justice system.

CHAIR: Unless members of the community see that sort of information they quite rightly will say, "The best way to get a kid into a prison is to put him or her under the care of the Department of Community Services." I am not saying that is true, but that might be an argument that people use. People might say, "We are just feeding the prison system if we make them wards of the State." That argument could be raised following that sort of information. I do not know how accurate the information is that was provided by the Community Services Commission. Next year, during hearings of this estimates committee, we might ask: How many of that 2 per cent are there each month? How many of those who were determined by the court to be no longer under parental control can be taken out because you picked up that responsibility?

Ms WESTACOTT: As I said earlier today, we are enhancing and overhauling our client information system so we can build up a picture of what happens over time to children in the care and protection system. We contest that figure of 30 per cent, or the one-third, that was referred to today. Work in our project shows that the figure is about 10 per cent.

CHAIR: I did not say that those figures were accurate; I just said that this information has been given to the Committee.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is your "Looking after Children" package a software package or a protocol? You said that you had bought the "Looking after Children" package?

Ms PELTOLA: It is a two-pronged system. The first part is a case management system which involves the way in which we plan for children. The second part involves collecting data about the day-to-day things that children need and must have, such as medical and dental information. It arose out of research in the United Kingdom which tried to enhance the way children were looked after. It is called Looking After Children because the United Kingdom calls the children looked after children, whereas we call them wards. They tended to base it on what a normal parent does and what is normal for children. We hope that the Looking After Children program will assist us to make sure that data is recorded for every child but also, very importantly, that the right things happen for those children—that they are having regular medical check-ups and that their dental check-ups are taking place. Some of the little things they ask us is who reads a story to the child at night. It covers the normal sorts of things that parents would do for their children.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So it is integrated with the client information software?

Ms PELTOLA: It will be. We are still working on that at the moment. Our negotiations have been successful with the United Kingdom and they are happy to provide it for us. We will then put that onto our new client system so that we will be completely automated for our offices.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I understand from what you are saying that you think longitudinal studies are desirable, but you have not quite decided how much of it you are going to do as opposed to the more qualitative studies of small groups of the type that Judy Cashmore has undertaken. Is that a summary of your position?

Ms PELTOLA: If I could just build on the answer that Ms Westacott gave earlier, our client system will enable us to pull out that kind of data, so rather than having to do ongoing studies about a number of things or having to do audits—

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You have a data collection model?

Ms PELTOLA: That is right. We will be able to ask or interrogate the system. It will be able to give us the history. Obviously, any criminal history would be part of that history.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: You said in answer paragraph (a) to question 22 that the implications of the implementation of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act later this year requires certain things. From press reports it would seem that some parts of the Act will be implemented this year and some parts will not. Do you have any details on which parts will or will not be implemented?

Ms PELTOLA: First of all, we are implementing the careful staging of the proclamation of the Act. Our focus is to get it right. What I can do is table the timetable for the proclamation.

CHAIR: Will you make that timetable available so that it can be made public?

Ms WESTACOTT: I can table it now.

Motion by the Hon. A. G. Corbett agreed to:

That pursuant to section 4 of the Parliamentary Papers (Supplementary Provisions) Act 1975 and under the authority of Standing Order 252 the Committee authorises the Clerk of the Committee to publish the submission of the Department of Community Services with regard to the timetable for implementation of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: It is my understanding also—again, according to press reports—that regulations concerning the Children's Guardian will not be implemented until June next year.

Ms WESTACOTT: The Children's Guardian has been announced. Linda Mallett has been appointed to the Children's Guardian position. She obviously needs time to set up her office, recruit staff and train them. What we intend to do is gradually proclaim and transfer responsibilities to her office as her staff are trained and as she is able to absorb those functions.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: So is it a fact, as I have been told by departmental people, that the regulation in relation to corporal punishment of foster children will now be a responsibility of the Children's Guardian?

Ms WESTACOTT: We have some feedback on that regulation and we intend to do two things. Let me go back to the reason we have taken it out. We obviously need to provide guidance to a number of agencies that

provide services to young children. It is about where they get those guidelines and where they get their information from. Is the best place to have it in a set of regulations that the foster carer may have difficulty accessing? We wanted to put it in the guidelines that would be issued by the Children's Guardian. What we have decided to do, as a result of feedback we have received, is put it both in the regulations and in the guidelines of the Children's Guardian.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: If it is in both the regulations and the guidelines of the Children's Guardian and the Children's Guardian will not operate until June next year, what is the current status of those regulations?

Ms WESTACOTT: That will be returning to the regulations as part of the proclamation of the Act.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: So when the Act is proclaimed, that regulation will still be in force?

Ms WESTACOTT: At the moment, that is right. We decided to reinstate it to the regulations. That is separate from the Children's Guardian guidelines which are issued to foster carers.

CHAIR: I return to question 5, which related to a conference that was held and referred to in the transcript of 23 August. It is stated in the transcript that there is universal support for permanency planning. That is, of course, almost a motherhood statement. Everyone is interested in having some sort of permanency for children's care. It was mentioned that a group which attended the conference is opposed to adoption under any circumstances, and a list of the issues of main concern to attendees was given. Will those issues and concerns be reflected in the Minister's white paper? In other words, will it be a warts-and-all white paper? That is, after all, the reason you held the conference?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

CHAIR: Will those issues be included in the white paper, including the pros and cons?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes. The way that the paper has been constructed is to try, as I said, to restate the Government's objectives in moving forward with this reform and to be clear about the provisions of the draft exposure bill, give details on the feedback we have received, and give a response to the feedback.

CHAIR: When the final bill is tabled, will the Minister indicate that there will be time for consultation on the actual bill that is being presented to the Parliament? Quite often we see an exposure bill, which is discussed, and the new bill that is introduced into Parliament bears almost no relationship to the original bill but has to be debated within two days.

Ms WESTACOTT: That is a matter of policy for the Minister.

CHAIR: So there is no undertaking, so far as you are aware, for the final draft bill that will be presented to Parliament to be brought into the House and left to lie on the table for a number of days?

Ms WESTACOTT: I will have to take that question on notice. I am not in a position to say.

CHAIR: Perhaps that is something I can ask someone else. I do not think it is necessarily something that you should have known. It is not your responsibility and I do not hold you to it, so you do not have to take that question on notice. But it is a matter of concern. Question 6 is very important from my point of view. It relates entirely to the whole issue of the number of Department of Community Services [DOCS] employees who have been sacked or placed on a monitoring program, or have been moved away from direct supervision of children as a result of the Wood royal commission. That is an issue for both DOCS and for the Health Department.

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

CHAIR: I notice that the Minister has still not been able to provide us with an answer. How long is it likely to be before I can obtain an answer to that question?

Ms WESTACOTT: I would imagine that there is going to be a quick turnaround of that question.

CHAIR: The other issue, of course, is that since this responsibility—the child protection responsibility—has fallen more and more on general practitioners and other service providers as a result of the

Wood royal commission, have many of your non-government organisation partners been screened in the same way as has been the case in DOCS? In other words, how successful are the other non-government organisations with which you have had dealings and for which you provide funding under the Act in providing services?

Ms WESTACOTT: We have an extensive program on screening for both Government and non-government services. I can report that over 7,000 names of our non-government community departments have been screened, so that is a substantial number of employees within the non-government sector. We are actively engaged in screening, as are the other agencies that you have mentioned.

CHAIR: To date, as a result of that screening, has anybody in the non-government sector been excluded? I have asked you questions about the government sector.

Ms WESTACOTT: I would have to take the question on the non-government sector on notice.

CHAIR: Even if there have been 7,000 screens, some of those would not be completed. Perhaps only 3,500 have been completed; I do not know how many have been completed. How many people have received a tick and a letter saying, "You have been screened, you are okay, get on with your life"? Or are those people saying, "I wonder if I have been screened; I wonder if I am okay. When will I get the big tick?"

Ms WESTACOTT: As you know, the Commission for Children and Young People is the lead agency on that. I would have to take that question on notice and refer it.

CHAIR: Has it cost a great deal of money?

Ms WESTACOTT: It has cost a great deal of money to implement. I do not know what the exact figure is off the top of my head. It has been a substantial investment, but a wise investment.

CHAIR: I do not think the community would quibble about the dollars, but I presume it is in the Community Services Commissioner's budget.

Ms WESTACOTT: They are with the Commission for Children and Young People. DOCS and Health have their own screening requirements as well. So it has been a sizeable investment, but an investment we were very happy to make and the Government was very happy to support.

CHAIR: If the Commission for Children and Young people says, "I want you to do it in this way", will the Government come forward with the money for DOCS and for the non-government sector to comply with the request from the commissioner? This is the question we asked at the earliest hearing. What guarantee is there from the Government? We are talking about reasonably substantial funds.

Ms WESTACOTT: We are. The Commission for Children and Young people has set the guidelines and we have responded to them. In 1999-2000 Treasury provided an additional \$597,000 to DOCS to undertake that screening.

CHAIR: Has that matched with your real needs in that regard?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes. We are in early days.

CHAIR: Within ball park figures?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes, it has. It was in response to a bid that we put forward.

CHAIR: You got what you wanted?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

CHAIR: And you are now proceeding?

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

CHAIR: It takes time. We have now reached 1.00 p.m. The Committee will be holding another hearing until 4.00 p.m. Is it possible to provide those answers verbally or in writing before the Committee at 4.00 p.m.? We could then receive the answers and finish the hearing.

Ms WESTACOTT: Yes.

CHAIR: I thank you and your departmental officers for your attendance. I am sorry we had to call you back, but serious questions were being asked, not only from us but to us. We are often mouthpieces for a large number of people in the community who want answers. It is a good opportunity for departments to clarify issues. Today we have had some clarification of your answers, for which I thank you. I also thank you for being part of the process.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: The departmental officers are entitled to an identifiable deadline.

CHAIR: I understand that you will be able to answer some of the questions this afternoon and, as you have indicated, some will take longer.

Ms WESTACOTT: We will endeavour to get what we can to you by 3.00 p.m. and what we cannot, because of bringing the time forward, we will give you an indication of when we can make it available.

CHAIR: I appreciate that.

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
