

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 2

Wednesday 7 June 2000

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

COMMUNITY SERVICES, AGEING, DISABILITY SERVICES, AND WOMEN

The Committee met at 8.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

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

The Hon. Jan Burnswoods
The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans
The Hon. A. G. Corbett

The Hon. R. D. Dyer
The Hon. Patricia Forsythe
The Hon. H. S. Tsang

PRESENT

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

Department of Community Services

Ms C. Niland, *Director-General*
Ms J. Westacott, *Deputy Director-General, Business Services*
Mr F. Orton, *Assistant Director, Finance*
Mr F. Azzopardi, *Management Accountant, Finance*
Ms K. Boland, *Executive Director, Corporate Communications*

Ageing and Disability Department

Ms M. Hammerton, *Director-General*
Ms M. Mitchell, *Director, Strategic Policy and Planning*
Ms J. Milligan, *Director, Program Performance*
Ms L. Scambler, *Director, Corporate Services*
Mr A. Calderan, *Manager, Finance*
Mr D. McNab, *Media Manager*

Department for Women

Ms R. Henderson, *Director-General*
Ms P. Hall, *Deputy Director-General*
Mr J. Scott, *Director, Management Services*
Ms S. Gorst, *Director, Civil Society Partnerships*
Ms P. White, *Office Manager*

CHAIR: I welcome you to this public hearing of the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2. I thank the Minister and the departmental officers for attending tonight. At this meeting the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure from the Consolidated Fund for the portfolio areas of the Department of Community Services, the Department of Ageing and Disability and the Department for Women.

Before questions commence, some procedural matters will need to be dealt with. As you 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 the public proceedings held here tonight. The Committee's resolution conforms with the guidelines governing the broadcast of proceedings adopted by the Legislative Council on 11 October 1994. The attendants on duty have copies of those guidelines. I emphasise that only members of the Committee and the witnesses before them may be filmed or recorded. 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 the reporting of the proceedings of both of the Houses of Parliament, you must take responsibility for what you publish or what interpretation is placed on anything that is said before the Committee. While there have been provisions in previous years' budget estimates resolutions for members of the Committee and substitute members to refer directly to their own staff at any time, there is no such provision in the current resolution. Members' staff are therefore advised that any messages should be delivered to the attendant on duty or to the Committee clerk.

For the benefit of Hansard and for the effective operation of this Committee it is very important that the departmental officers identify themselves by name, position and department or agency before answering each question. Wide latitude is allowed for answering questions on any of the budget estimates and related documents before the Committee. However, where a member is seeking information in relation to a particular program or subprogram, it would help the Minister and the Committee if the program or subprogram were identified.

The Committee has agreed with the format of the hearing as follows: there will be questions across all portfolio areas during this hearing; the arrangement we have agreed to follow is that the Hon. Patricia Forsythe will lead, followed by the Hon. A. G. Corbett, followed by me, followed by the Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans. We take the view that any question or series of questions will be followed to its logical conclusion. Any member of the Committee can ask a question on a particular issue before the member proceeds. I will attempt to make an even, fair split. The Australian Labor Party members have indicated that at this stage they have no questions that they wish to put, but they will take part in questioning on individual issues.

As you are aware, two hours have been set aside for tonight's public hearing. If at the conclusion of the hearing members have not exhausted questions to which they require answers, the Committee may decide to hold additional hearings before it is required to report on 23 June. The Committee has determined that any supplementary questions should be tabled with the clerk by 5.00 p.m. tomorrow.

Is the lower House sitting this evening?

Mrs LO PO': Yes, it is.

CHAIR: Have arrangements been made about divisions?

Mrs LO PO': Not by me. I do not have a pair.

CHAIR: If there is a division, would you prefer that we continue in your absence or wait until you come back?

Mrs LO PO': Given the time frame, please continue. I am not expecting divisions in our House.

CHAIR: Are there any questions?

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Minister, I think you will agree that one of the key issues for the department this year is going to be the implementation of the new child protection legislation. I would like to ask some questions arising out of that. My first question is not to you but to the Director-General. Could you advise what advice you have given the Minister about the proposals to remove children from violent homes and have them adopted?

Mrs LO PO': I thank you for the question.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I have directed the question to the Director-General.

Mrs LO PO': Yes, I understand that. We will get to that. As you have all heard me speak about this subject, I am happy for Carmel Niland to speak to you about it.

Ms NILAND: The advice that I have given the Minister is assisting the Parliamentary Counsel with the drafting of an exposure bill. The exposure bill is an amendment to the Child Protection Act. It looks at the permanency planning for children, and adoption is one of the options in permanency planning.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Has the Minister ignored your calls to water down the proposal to remove children from violent homes?

Ms NILAND: I have never made a call to do that, or made any call at all in these circumstances.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Have you put forward any advice to the Minister that would suggest that you prefer the United States model, which is to support families to provide better care for the children in their own homes?

Ms NILAND: The United States proposal of Bill Clinton, called Adoption 2001, was handed to me by the Minister to assess it. I assessed it and aspects of it are reflected in the draft exposure bill.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: As a model does it have cost implications that caused you to rule out that model? Was it considered to be too expensive for New South Wales?

Ms NILAND: It is not a model that we went into in any great detail at all. We were instead interested in the aspects of the model that actually quantified what was a reasonable effort by a department to have ensured that a family had the capacity within it and the assistance from a welfare agency to adapt and change, so that it created a safe haven for the children of that family.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I ask the Minister what evidence or advice she has relied on in forming her views about the adoption proposals that have been spoken about?

Mrs LO PO': We have certainly looked across the Internet to see what we could pick up there. There were the Clinton documents, there were documents from the United Kingdom under the present Blair Government, the debate that has been pending. We have also leaned on some research done in the United States. There has been research done by our own Community Services Commissioner, who actually said that the drift of foster children into the Juvenile Justice area has led to their being over-represented in that area. I have looked at files where we have had children who have come from the most abusive homes in the State. We have also in recent days had a back-up with Bruce Perry coming out from Texas. He says that if we do not assist children to remain undamaged in their first three years, they probably are damaged for life.

There is a body of evidence, not just from our department but from all points across the world—America and England—that says that children who come from abusive homes where they can never be restored need to be given another family. As an example, yesterday we had a foster carer attend the press conference who had taken care of a little girl, six months old, who had been given 18 years wardship. My contention is that if the courts are giving 18 years wardship, why are they not finding a home for this child where she can be loved, cared for and protected for the rest of her life?

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: You have mentioned the British model and you referred to surfing the net. Does the British model not suggest that about 20 per cent of all adoptions break down?

Mrs LO PO': I have not read that. The British model that I saw suggested that children who were in abusive homes were better off being adopted out. In fact in one of the pieces I read they give a limited time, and in that limited time if the parents do not shape up, so to speak, they then revert to the courts for adoption. If you have any evidence I will be very happy to read it, because as you know, a draft exposure bill will be out for the next few months and we will take on all suggestions. We expect communities to be writing to us about their thoughts on this issue. If you have any information, I would be happy to read it.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: In relation to providing support for adoptive parents, what sort of resources is it anticipated could be given to adoptive parents?

Mrs LO PO': There are several levels. The person I spoke to yesterday would be very happy to adopt this little girl outright. Her words to me were that she would be happy to have her as one of her family. She said that resourcing was not an issue for her. My sense of this is that if we are giving children over to families for adoption and they are very damaged children who have challenging behaviours and a whole lot of damaged behavioural habits, we would be looking very closely at giving them support, if they had to take them to psychologists or incur more expense than the normal family could afford.

My understanding from speaking to the foster parents, who are totally supportive of this, is that their thoughts are that they would be delighted if they could adopt some of the children they have in their care, and resourcing is not an issue for them.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: If resourcing is not an issue for them, it must be an issue for the department. Under the normal practice, once a child is adopted out the department ceases to have a direct role. You are now talking about a much more proactive role for adoption and changing the policy considerably. Is it about wrapping resources around these adoptive families?

Ms LO PO': No, it is not about wrapping resources around them. I am saying that if we have a child who has damaged behaviour and needs that extra support, I would imagine that we would be giving some assistance to the family to get that child to the necessary services.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: You just said you imagine that you would give some resources. Is there any indication in the budget that resources will be available?

Ms LO PO': You have to understand the process. This will not become legislation until the end of the year. For the first group of people who will be rolling through this it will not be instant, because casework will need to be done, the matter will go to the Children's Court, which will make an order that will go to the Supreme Court. So I do not expect that this year a single child will come under this model.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: How do you answer the allegation that moving the children out of foster care and into adoption is really about cutting costs?

Ms LO PO': It is an easy allegation to withstand, simply because for anybody who reads the sorts of harrowing files that I read about children who are being brutalised, sodomised, molested, raped, scalded, burnt, money is not an issue. All we need to do is to remove those children from the "care" of those alleged parents and put them out into a more positive and permanent placement. The difficulty we have now is that we have children who go from abuser to foster home, and when the foster carers are starting to love them we remove the children and put them back with the abuser; they are re-abused, of course, and we put them with another foster home; and so the yoyo goes on. Children are survivors and what they learn to do and understand is that when they are put with somebody who loves them or whom they love, they get hurt. So what they do is put a shell around themselves to prevent being hurt, and we find these young angry people growing up in our community who lack compassion. They have never either allowed themselves to be loved or indeed have never loved anyone.

Surely to God nobody in this whole Parliament, regardless of political persuasions, thinks that we should continue such a system. Surely we would be saying to ourselves: What is the purpose of yoyo-ing these children backwards and forwards to foster homes? Why would we not be asking for a permanent placement to a family who could care for them, love them, look after them and protect them as other families do? Children's greatest influence in their first three years are the adults around them. If they fail them, we, as a community, have a duty of care to give them another family and what I am saying is that we need to empower the courts, as part of their smorgasbord of care orders, to make one of the care orders adoption because, as we saw yesterday, why would you give a baby of six weeks an eighteen year care order? Why would you not have them adopted out?

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Minister, you have talked about abusive homes and you have talked about looking for more positive and permanent homes, just giving some examples. What about the second or subsequent children born into the family where the child has been taken away, using your example yesterday. What is the process going to be? Is that child automatically going to be referred to the courts? Is the department going to attempt to support the family? Is there any early intervention proposed?

Mrs LO PO': There are two parts to that question. Early intervention is certainly there. The Families First program, which is a \$54.9 million program, is one of the platforms of this Government of which we are extremely proud. Families First is a program of intervention—

CHAIR: The Honourable Patricia Forsythe asked you specifically about parents from whom a child has been born and taken away, particularly what you have referred to in the past—

Mrs LO PO': Yes, but I said there are two parts and then she mentioned what intervention are we going to give; what support? There are two parts to this question. I am dealing with the intervention part first. Families First is a program that we have introduced and a total of \$39.8 million has been allocated to DOCS over four years for the establishment of new community-based services. These services will augment existing networks of prevention and early intervention services across the State that support carers and parents. Ten million dollars has also been allocated to New South Wales Health over four years to fund additional health services for families with young children. Families First is based on research which shows that prevention and early intervention services have a sustained effect on improving a child's start in life, which is exactly what we have been talking about, particularly if these services are provided as part of a coordinated network of services.

The second part of your question was relevant to the person I was talking about yesterday. The little girl I saw yesterday was the fourth child—the fourth child—to be removed from that family, so the department had intervened on the first three, they had been removed and they are out in foster care. This was the fourth child, so the department is being very vigilant about these particular families. This is a family that has difficulty with drugs. The regret of the foster mother about whom I speak is that the child is a foster child and she cannot adopt her at this point.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Can I come back to the specific budget issues and particularly the whole issue of early intervention. In this budget, how much is actually allocated for early intervention?

Mrs LO PO': In this budget?

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: In this budget.

Mrs LO PO': I will defer to my Director-General.

Ms NILAND: In this particular budget the allocation for early intervention is over a number of the various allocations. It includes money which is in our Community Services Grants program, and I will go to that in a moment. It includes money that we have available to implement the new legislation and it includes money that is coming through DOCS for Families First program. So it is coming from three different sources and I have to actually go to those, if you could just wait a moment.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Minister, would it be easier if I asked you to perhaps table that amount at the end of the 30-minute section rather than wasting time now?

Ms NILAND: Okay, I will take that question on notice.

CHAIR: That is taken on notice, thank you.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: But I would like an answer before 10 o'clock.

Ms NILAND: Sure.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: If I could move now to some of the issues that flow from this and that is the departmental handling of child protection issues and in particular the issue of unallocated cases, I understand that the Community Services Commissioner, Robert Fitzgerald, has made a number of calls in relation to the issue of unallocated cases, in particular that the Government makes public on a regular basis the number of unallocated cases. What steps have been taken to collect this data and why does the data not exist now?

Mrs LO PO': Are you asking me?

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I will ask you, Minister, but the Director-General may obviously wish to take it.

Mrs LO PO': All organisations have to prioritise their work and DOCS is no exception. It is particularly relevant in organisations that give a human service. A district officer and an assistant manager

review every notification that comes in to DOCS before being prioritised. Priorities can be and are reviewed on a regular basis based on workload and any new information which may come to light.

With the setting up of the teleservice centre later this year all child protection calls will come in to DOCS through one central point—this is very important—and DOCS will be able to more accurately measure caseloads across the State and allocate resources accordingly. At present caseload information is gathered at the local level and comparative figures are difficult to obtain. New risk assessment tools are being developed which allow even better assessments of risk to children. The new Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, which will be proclaimed later this year, will also assist DOCS in focusing its resources towards children most at risk and in need of statutory intervention.

DOCS has been actively seeking ways to reduce the administrative workload of district officers to enable them to spend more time face to face with clients. Some of these initiatives include replacing antiquated and slow computers with about 2,000 new computers and 450 lap-tops to boost workplace efficiencies; developing a new client information system giving quick and easy access to vital case information; exploring ways to boost administrative support at the front-line under the transformation initiatives. The teleservice centre will appoint 100 additional staff which will also free-up front-line child and family staff for more face-to-face work. The DOCS policy for managing and prioritising workloads is currently under review and the full-time positions for district officers have increased from 866.2 in March 1998 to 883 in March this year. So the issue of unallocated cases is an issue that is ever present and we work on it on a daily basis.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Minister, you referred to the teleservice centre opening later this year. Was it not originally proposed to open in July?

Mrs LO PO': Yes.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: What is the basis for the delay?

Mrs LO PO': It is opening in July.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: So later this year means next month?

Mrs LO PO': Yes, later this year is next month.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: In relation to the whole issue of unallocated cases, how many cases of children under one are not followed through? Have you done allocations over the last year of children under one?

Mrs LO PO': There are no under-ones that we are aware of that are unallocated.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Minister, how do you account for the findings of a DOCS report into the Nowra office that found that, in one month alone, 10 notifications involving children under one were not followed up?

Mrs LO PO': That is a serious allegation. I do not know if we can answer it here, but we certainly will answer it when we get the information. Do you have some information on that?

Ms NILAND: Yes, I do have some information on that, but I would like to take that question on notice because when we did an inquiry into it what was reported publicly and what actually occurred in the inquiry were two different things. The way that that was reported publicly was inaccurate. Therefore, I would like to take that question on notice so that I can give you the aspect of the inquiry so that you are quite clear.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: You are denying that the report made about the Nowra office was correct?

Ms NILAND: I am denying that the way that that was reported in the media was correct, not that there was not a report, which is correct; not that the report found some very ineffective practices in the Nowra office, which is also correct. What I am disputing is that particular finding.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: If there were unacceptable practices in the Nowra office, what has been done to correct those practices?

CHAIR: Could I just confirm that the question has been taken on notice by the Director-General.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: What has been done to correct whatever were the obvious problems or the problems at the Nowra office?

Ms NILAND: A number of things have been done. First, a manager with specialisation in child and family services has been allocated to the office for a number of days per week. The second thing that has been done is that the staff ratio at that office has been improved. The third thing that has been done is that Nowra, rather than take intake itself, is now part of a pool in the former Illawarra area where intake is going through a centralised point prior to being transferred to the teleservice centre. The fourth thing that has been done is that there has been comprehensive support put in to the office to re-engineer the business systems that were working there which were overloading the people with work, so even when work was finished, even when cases were finished, those cases were not being taken away, they had been left there as active. We found a case, for example, that was active since 1994 and it was still open, so I just give you that as an example. So they are the main initiatives in the Nowra office.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Having discovered the problems at the Nowra office, has there been a review of practices in other offices to assure yourself that similar problems are not occurring in other offices?

Ms NILAND: The review of our performance is constant and not only does it roll out across the State through a variety of processes, it is also triggered when there shows up some form of discrepancy and that might come as a result of a complaint. That complaint might come from the Community Services Commission or it might come from our own client feedback office. That also triggers a review.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Currently are there any other offices that are the cause of concern for the department?

Ms NILAND: Not that come to mind, no.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: So there is general satisfaction with the performance of all other offices of the department?

Ms NILAND: No, that is not what I said. In a human service agency you are striving for continuous improvement. The department is rolling out a massive transformation of the way that it does its business. This is in preparation for the introduction of the new care and protection act that will radically change the way in which we process. Most of the business services within the organisation will change as a result of that. So when we come across problem areas we are in a process of regular review and continuous improvement.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Where you have problems identified, would it be usual to involve, for example, the Community Services Commission to give advice to the department about the performance of the office?

Ms NILAND: The Community Services Commission has provided us with a number of reports. The Community Services Commission, if it receives a complaint, notifies us of that. If, for example, we were getting a complaint from the Community Services Commission and a complaint from our own client feedback service, that could prompt us to do further inquiry, but the Community Services Commission makes well known its various recommendations in its reports. Those are useful but I would not seek out that agency's specific advice on how to re-engineer a business service because that is not its area of expertise. I meet with Robert Fitzgerald once every two weeks, and of course on our agenda are any problem areas that either one of us identifies. We share information in that way.

The Hon. P. FORSYTHE: I will just ask one question. In the light of what you have said about meeting fortnightly with the Community Services Commission, there was a very tragic case involving a death earlier this year. In fact there was the death of a three-year-old on the North Coast. One of the issues that has arisen about it has been whether the department, or when the department referred the issue to the Community Services Commission for report and investigation.

Ms NILAND: It is not the department's role to refer a matter like that to the Community Services Commission. It is the Minister's role to refer something to the Community Services Commission, and I hand that over to the Minister.

Mrs LO PO': The reason that was not handed over—I know the case you are talking about, although we cannot talk about the case—was that it affected three government departments. The Community Services Commissioner does not have the clout to rove over three separate departments, so it was given to the Children's Commissioner, who has more power than the Community Services Commissioner, who has only the power to look at the two portfolios. The Children's Commissioner can overlook every portfolio, and that is why it was given to her.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Minister, I would like to go back and look at the child protection process. Firstly, how many section 22 child risk notifications did the department record last year?

Mrs LO PO': We have not got that information here. I can take that question on notice.

CHAIR: That matter is taken on notice? I am surprised.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: From your knowledge, Minister, who are the main notifiers of children at risk?

Mrs LO PO': The main notifiers are the pre-schools and schools. We know this because when the schools are on holiday we get less notifications than when the schools are there, and that is the reason that we have been very diligent about our under-ones policy, because they are the little people in some cases that are not looked at by anybody else. Pre-schoolers, school children, are in contact with other people, and they are our greatest notifiers.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Is it true that parents are some of the prime notifiers?

Mrs LO PO': No. If they are the perpetrators, they are hardly also the notifiers.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: No, I agree with you, but what about family members?

Mrs LO PO': Not usually, no.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Is it a fact that notifications are divided into those that require a field response and those which do not, and is it true that the ones which do not require a field response are known as "intake only"?

Mrs LO PO': I will ask Carmel, because she has a case file there.

Ms NILAND: Yes, they are known as "intake only".

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: So "intake only" are those who do not require a field response?

Ms NILAND: They do not require an immediate field response, but those that are registered as intake only may be referred on to a number of other agencies.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: So those that are not referred on to another agency, they are then said to require a field response by DOCS officers?

Ms NILAND: Yes.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: What does that field response actually entail?

Ms NILAND: A field response may entail anything from immediately going and viewing a child and making an assessment of that child as to its safety and wellbeing, through to a very complex case management process. A field response may involve going to the police, somebody's house at night, where there is domestic violence. It may involve us assisting the police locate and identify a missing child. It may be working with a local refuge to assist a child in that refuge. When we are talking about what a field response is, the variables go to hundreds—and the answers.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: So once again, if that child is said to or is notified as requiring a field response, you are saying that some children will not be seen by DOCS, is that true?

Ms NILAND: Yes.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: So some children who require a field response are not seen by DOCS officers, and some children will be seen by DOCS officers?

Ms NILAND: Yes.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Have you got any idea of the numbers of that breakdown?

Ms NILAND: No, but I can take it on notice and get you those numbers.

CHAIR: That question is taken on notice.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Is there a possibility that children who require a field response do not get it because of lack of resources?

Ms NILAND: It is a very difficult question for me to answer.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Do the various DOCS officers have records of children who they would like to see but cannot see because there is just not the staff there? I have heard that DOCS officers can sometimes have 50 or 60 cases on their books, and of course it is very difficult for them to see a child.

Ms NILAND: I think you have then got to deconstruct actually what those cases are, and how active they are. For example, you might have a case on your books and you are waiting for that case to come to court. It may take six months or nine months for it to get to court and the case sits there during that particular time. The case is still active—it still involves contact—but it might not actually involve a field response, by which we usually mean leaving the office and going and seeing, or being actively involved in, the family in some way.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Do we have any idea of the numbers of children in the various area offices who are said to require a field response?

Ms NILAND: We would have from intake generally those, but one of the problems with it is that we have an ageing computer system, and an aging process, and starting in the second half of the year we start rolling out a new client information system, as the Minister mentioned, a teleservice centre. There we have a state-of-the-art way of actually answering all questions like that. So if I am not coming back to you clearly, it is not because we do not want to know the answers and want to provide them, it is because we have inaccurate data on those things.

CHAIR: Last year you may remember that I asked you about benchmarking in terms of time to see in different categories what the DOCS officer would assess the case to need—whether it is a field intervention, an urgent intervention or whatever. Have those benchmarks been published yet?

Ms NILAND: No, they have not been published.

CHAIR: When can we expect to see them?

Ms NILAND: When we have a client information system that can actually measure it.

CHAIR: When is that going to be?

Ms NILAND: The client information system comes in on 15 December.

CHAIR: Have you developed the benchmarks you are going to use yet, or are you going to wait until you have the information system?

Ms NILAND: No, they all have to be actually built into the client information system.

CHAIR: So you must have worked out what you want now, if you are going to get the program set up?

Ms NILAND: We have, and the benchmark that we are using on that is the one that our colleagues in Western Australia have been using. Off the top of my head, it is something like the number of cases dealt with, I

think, within three days of actual reception. There is a particular benchmark set and, once again off the top of my head, I recall that benchmark as being 80 per cent activated within three days of receiving it. But I am happy to take that question on notice and come back to you with the accurate information.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Director-General, of those children who are classified as needing a field response and are seen by DOCS officers, are some then registered as a child at risk?

Ms NILAND: Yes.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: What does it mean if they are registered as a child at risk?

Ms NILAND: That means that they have been assessed by a person who is either a qualified social worker, or who has been trained within the DOCS system and, on the basis of that professional assessment—according to our Statute; the current Statute that we are operating under—they have determined that that child is in imminent risk of harm, neglect or abuse.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Imminent risk?

Ms NILAND: Yes.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: So it is fairly serious stuff?

Ms NILAND: It is of concern, yes.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Once the DOCS officers have actually seen the child and they have registered the child, what happens to that file; to that child?

Ms NILAND: An assessment is made as to how that case is going to be managed. A case conference could very well be called. When I say could very well, a case conference would be called in that instance. That case conference would involve the child, depending on the child's age. That case conference could involve the parents, or whoever is the significant other in the child's life, and a range of others including who may have notified. If, for example, this has come to our attention through our primary notifiers—who are educationalists, police and health—they would definitely be included in that case conference.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: In order to understand correctly, are you saying that if a child is registered, there will be a case conference? Or is the case conference for only some of the children who are registered?

Ms NILAND: It is for only some of the children who are registered because that may not be the most appropriate response. In some instances, the risk might be so critical that the child has to be removed within a matter of minutes or hours—that is, as soon as the proper statutory or legal work can be done.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Okay. If a child has been registered, does it happen sometimes that these files are actually allocated to a manager or an assistant manager of a DOCS office?

Ms NILAND: What happens is all the files belong to an assistant manager, who is then authorised to allocate those cases. If, for example, a case is considered to be lower priority, it is technically allocated to the assistant manager. So that sits on the assistant manager's desk or in his or her files.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: So it could be technically allocated to the assistant manager?

Ms NILAND: Yes.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: It would be very rare, would it not, for an assistant manager to actually go out in the field?

Ms NILAND: No, it is very common for an assistant manager to go out in the field.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Very common?

Ms NILAND: Yes.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Can you give me a percentage?

Ms NILAND: No, I cannot. But, because I have had the opportunity to work with an assistant manager and with a child protection worker, I am aware of instances where they have been out in the field with me.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: I would imagine that it would be difficult for an assistant manager to get out in the field because of all the other duties and responsibilities that they have.

Ms NILAND: Whatever you might imagine, that is not my experience. It is not uncommon for an assistant manager to get out into the field.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Is it true that some unallocated cases are then divided into high risk, medium risk and low risk?

Ms NILAND: That would be one way of classifying them.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Who would do that classification?

Ms NILAND: The assistant manager.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: The assistant manager?

Ms NILAND: It would be signed off by the manager of the CSC as well.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Would the assistant manager take on the high risk cases, or would it be a combination of all three?

Ms NILAND: The assistant manager would have the low risk cases.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Just the low risk, and the high risk and medium risk ones would go to active DOCS officers?

Ms NILAND: Correct.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: That is all for the moment.

The Hon. H. TSANG: Can I jump in for a quick question?

CHAIR: Of course you can.

The Hon. H. TSANG: The impression I have is that there is lack of money for case work, and there is a long-term problem with long-term foster care. I have a question for the Minister. On page 5.21 there is a line item "Child support allowances and associated expenses for foster care", which is \$59.924 million. Is that extra increase from \$40.264 million allocating extra moneys for this exposure bill you have for adoption, or is it for something else? What is this extra money for?

Mrs LO PO': This is a foster care amount. I thank the honourable member for his question. We all know that some children, through no fault of their own, cannot be cared for by their own families. These children need our special attention so that they can grow up with the same opportunities of other children.

The Carr Government is committed to making sure that children who are away from their families get the best quality care. Foster care is the best option for most children. It gives troubled children a stable home and the individual care and attention that every child needs. These are children who have the capacity to be restored to their families from time to time—not all of them, but some can be restored to their families.

There is an ongoing need for foster carers in New South Wales, and indeed nationally. So what is our government doing to ensure our foster carers are getting a better deal? We are announcing in this budget an extra \$19.7 million in foster care funding. Let me remind those in the Opposition that that takes our foster care funding from \$79.3 million when we came into government five years ago to \$150 million now.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Can I comment on this, Minister? What is the new rate for foster carers from 1 July coming out of that budget?

Mrs LO PO: We are still working on that.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You do not have an answer to that question? You cannot give me the rate?

Mrs LO PO: I cannot give you the rate now, but I can tell you it is good news. This makes a total allocation of funding for foster carers to \$60 million. Carers are currently receiving allowances ranging from \$129 to \$272 a fortnight, but after 1 July a flat rate allowance—which we will inform you of after July 1—is proposed to be, on average, substantially higher. Extra money will still be available for carers who incur extra expenses approved by the Department of Community Services for those children's special needs.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Some items have to be paid for that were previously covered by contingency items. It seems this belief is common amongst foster carers and non-government organisations [NGOs]. What will they be expected to pay for above the allowance—shoes, clothes, haircuts, what sorts of things?

Mrs LO PO: They will come out of the allowance, which will be substantially higher.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If they required special education tutoring, will that be covered in the standard age fostering allowance [SAFA] or on a contingency basis?

Mrs LO PO: We are still working that out but it will be a case-by-case assessment of what those needs are.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Does that mean contingency, not SAFA?

Mrs LO PO: It will be a flat rate, and we are still working on the flat rate, because not all foster children are the same.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What is the dollar amount for contingency in this year's budget?

Mrs LO PO: You cannot find it in the budget because it is rolled up with the foster care allowance, and that is how we came to calculate the flat rate.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Given that last year, in particular areas, the State found problems with the allocated budget for contingencies, what modelling or resource allocation model is being used to ensure that children's needs are being met?

Mrs LO PO: Can I put to bed the difficulty that people found last year? It was because we located the contingency fund centrally because we found it was very patchy and some offices were allocating funds differently. So it was taken up to a higher level and, of course, the people who handled that were not happy with that. There was a concern by the people who had been handling the contingency funds that it had been taken a step higher than them and they were not happy about that. So it was not that there was less money; it was that different people were handling it. The people who thought that they would be handling it did not get a guernsey and they were concerned. I want to put to bed the idea that the contingencies had been diminished in any way, because that is not true. Extra money will still be available for carers who incur extra expenses approved by the Department of Community Services for those children with special needs. This initiative will provide a sound basis for the development of plans to promote more secure long-term places for children coming into care.

The Government recognises the critical need to support foster carers and the children they take into their homes. This increased contribution to foster carers will take into account the costs associated with bringing up children. The new payment means carers can meet the day-to-day needs of foster children and young people and make decisions about those needs without always having to seek DOCS approval. This will be in line with the new Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, which gives people more autonomy to make day-to-day decisions about the needs of children and young people in their care. Foster carers tell me that fostering is not an easy task, but it is a very rewarding one. Foster carers can, and do, make a real difference to a child's life.

They really can improve a child's chances. The Foster Carers Association has applauded the move to increase the funds to foster carers. Let me remind you again that we have increased the funding from \$79.3 million in 1995 to \$150 million this year. So we have almost doubled it in five years.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What model is going to be used to allocate that money?

Mrs LO PO': We are working through that model now as we speak. We want to get it right, so we are doing a range of work with us and other people who have expertise in this area. We will get it right by 1 July.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Could I come back to the number of allocated cases.

CHAIR: We are still on contingency and the issue of foster carers and allowances.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I wish to follow up on the estimate of the number of children in foster care. Does the department make an estimation for the coming year of the number of children in foster care when setting the budget?

Mrs LO PO': We know from the year before, but it is one of those demand issues that we will meet when it comes.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Have you factored in an increase in the number of foster children in the last twelve months?

Mrs LO PO': Yes, we have.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: In terms of inflation, what inflation figure is the department working to?

Ms NILAND: When we have been looking at the foster care allowances, if you actually break down the \$20 million growth, we have got \$9.936 million in recognition of the increased demand and growth. We have got \$1.047 million for indexation, \$3.178 million for the goods and services tax [GST] and \$5.499 million for growth funding. We are calculating approximately a demand of 7 per cent growth. When I say "approximately" you would appreciate that, because a new Act is coming into play in the first half of the financial year, it means that there will be different ways of counting. That might mean, for example, that fewer children come into care.

[Short adjournment]

CHAIR: With regard to the DOCS budget and the Ageing and Disability Department [ADD], I am covering those two areas in my next group of questions. Two items of significant cost implications are apparently not covered in the estimates.

First of all, the social and community services [SACS] award. I have been communicating with Alison Peters, the branch secretary of the Australian Services Union New South Wales, regarding her concerns about the SACS award. Will that be funded by the Government when the arbitration is complete, so that the real needs in terms of the allocations to non-government organisations will mean the same amount of employment? That question is directed to ADD.

Ms HAMMERTON: The New South Wales Government is not party to the proceedings in the commission. Obviously, the resolution of the award application is a matter for the union representing employees in the industry, employer representatives and the commission. We are monitoring the progress of the award application. Obviously both DOCS and ADD are in the same situation there.

CHAIR: The question specifically is: If an increase is awarded to the SACS workers, will the Government fund that increase?

Ms HAMMERTON: Until we see what the outcome is, the Government is in no position to take a view.

CHAIR: So the answer is no, is that right?

Ms HAMMERTON: That is not what I said.

Mrs LO PO': That is not what is being said. In most cases, the Government is not the employer of these people. We are watching the award case and no decision has been made. That is what is being said.

CHAIR: If you do not cover the cost, there is going to be a reduction in services. That is the option. You have only two options.

Mrs LO PO': You have been around long enough to understand that no government signs a blank cheque on anything. We are waiting to see what happens.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: The question I have is: if the award does come down and if the Government did fund it, would it fund it this year or would people have to wait until next year's budget?

Mrs LO PO': My advice is that when the decision on the award is handed down in the commission, final advice on the costs and implications for the partner agencies will be forwarded to the New South Wales Treasury and to the Commonwealth in relation to the Commonwealth-State programs. DOCS will work with community partners to minimise the impact of award changes on services to families and communities.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: So basically it has to go to Treasury to determine whether it funds it this year or in the next budget?

Mrs LO PO': That is my advice.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: You said that final advice will go to Treasury. What interim advice has gone to Treasury?

Mrs LO PO': Treasury is watching the Industrial Relations Commission case, as we all are. That is the only advice we are informed of. The final advice will be when it is finally handed down.

CHAIR: Will you follow the Federal Government in grossing up the funding grants to non-government agencies to cover the implications of the GST?

Mrs LO PO': The Government will increase by 10 per cent all grants to charities or community organisations that are registered for the GST. Those non-profit organisations providing human services to disadvantaged people in communities will be allowed to keep the benefits of the saving that will come from the removal of embedded wholesale tax.

CHAIR: The next question I have is from the New South Wales Budget 2000 and the ADD paper entitled "Initiatives in Disability Services Living in the Community". Under the heading "Devolution", it says that the Government's commitment to furthering devolution is reflected in funding of \$14.597 million over four years. There is also an additional \$10 million in capital funding available for two years. From the ADD paper, it seems that stage one, which previously involved moving 83 residents in institutions designed to be relocated by 2003, has now been expanded to involve a total of more than 400 people with disabilities to be relocated at the end of stage one in 2004. Have you targeted particular institutions to close, and which ones are they?

Mrs LO PO': The Government has a serious commitment to devolution and expects the process realistically to take 12 years from when it was announced. Responsiveness and flexibility are the key components of devolution. The residents of DOCS centres, their families, guardians, and personal advocates will be consulted first and their fears about alternative accommodation arrangements will be considered first.

This has to be, and will be, an incremental process which respects the unique needs of individuals and will be appraised before any decisions are made on the most appropriate form of accommodation and support. The Ageing and Disability Department's Community Living Development Unit now has eight people dedicated to this work who are also working in close co-operation with the existing service providers. Despite assertions by some so-called advocacy groups, recurrent and capital funding is available for devolution, including some Commonwealth funds provided to the State Government under the Commonwealth-State disability agreement.

Devolution projects have already started this year, with a mixture of DOCS and non-government facilities, including DOCS' Marsden Rehabilitation Centre and the Gower Street annexe of the Grosvenor Centre, with the non-government sector's Cram House at Wollongong and Whitehall, Revesby. We will continue to consult parents and carers on the best support options for their loved ones. As the advocates well

know, in spite of their strident support for the closure of large residential institutions, there is a considerable degree of parental resistance to devolution. The process of working through new community-inclusive accommodation and supports for people has to be handled very delicately and carried out with the utmost sensitivity.

The Government has acknowledged the benefits of devolution and has committed itself to a program for change. We want to take the families with us. The Coalition in its election statement on disabilities said:

The Coalition is committed to the devolution of institutions. However, the relocation of residents will involve the families and guardians of residents and will only occur when the guarantees of appropriate levels of care can be given to the families.

The Coalition committed words only; there was no real action plan and no real timetable. We are still waiting to hear the timetable.

CHAIR: What criteria are you using to prioritise? I have read what you are going to do at stage 1. I would have thought there would be a stage one, stage two, stage three and a stage four. You have identified what you are going to spend this money on in stage one and mentioned a couple of properties that will be devolved. What criteria are you using to establish the priorities for stage one?

Ms HAMMERTON: The Community Living Development Unit in ADD has spent the last four or five months systematically visiting DOCS facilities, non-government facilities and gathering a true picture of their circumstances. On the basis of that work, further advice was given to the Minister about a potential extended stage one, using a range of criteria. I think we should take on notice an answer to the detail around the criteria, because it is not so simple to be able to unfold in a few sentences.

In consideration of that advice the Minister made a decision. The Government has endorsed further expenditure around additional devolution activity, which will bring an additional 400 people out of institutions by the end of a four-year period, December four years hence. Within that context there has been particular emphasis on the 180 children and young adults who will be considered, and obviously we will be working—and have started working—very closely with those individuals and their families. It is not possible to easily project ahead in the order of 12 years, or what will be probably a bit less than 12 years if one takes the four years out of the 12 years, simply because that does not give much hope to the families and organisations concerned. What the Government would like to see happen is that, through the experience that unfolds, it is possible to move faster as time goes by. But it must be remembered that the service system needs to grow, as well as the community learning and acceptance about taking people with disabilities back into the community. That challenge is being addressed by the investment of new dollars in a whole lot of other ways in the budget.

CHAIR: From my point of view, from listening to you last year and having regard to the inquiry that has gone on, it seems to me that at the end of 2004—halfway through your four-year plan—less than one-third of the people will have been moved into community care. How will you provide for the others? Or is it, as the Community Services Commissioner has said, going to be devolution by death?

Ms HAMMERTON: I think the Community Services Commissioner is quite heartened, very heartened indeed, by the news that has come with the budget. It is a question of momentum picking up over time. We are talking about raising the levels significantly.

CHAIR: With one-third in the first six years and two-thirds in the last six years it is going to be really picking up the momentum. There will be no moss on this scale of devolution.

Ms HAMMERTON: The momentum is certainly picking up: 180 people were devolved from when Minister Dyer announced the 12-year program. Time and investment were put into creating the Community Living Development Unit. That process of identifying the status of where the facilities are at has just been completed. That information is what the Government and Ministers need to make decisions around, specifically as to what happens next. We know that if we take all parties along with us, if we get good, acceptable community living arrangements for people out of the institutions, there is every reason why that momentum should pick up.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Can I clarify with the Minister or the Director-General something that was mentioned earlier in relation to children and young people. You used the word "considered". Can I get clarification of whether it is intended that all children and young people will have been moved out of the larger institutions at the end of stage 1?

Ms HAMMERTON: It is certainly the intention that all children are moved out of institutions, yes.

CHAIR: The question asked whether it would be done by the end of stage one?

Ms HAMMERTON: Yes, by the end of stage one.

The Hon. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: With the de-institutionalisation project, is there a similar project for brain-injured people and, if so, at what stage is that?

Ms HAMMERTON: Can we have some clarification? A project for brain-injured people?

The Hon. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: There is a brain-injured group.

Ms HAMMERTON: Out of where?

The Hon. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: There is a brain-injured group, is there not?

Ms HAMMERTON: Yes. Out of where are you talking about?

The Hon. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: A number of people. There is a group of brain-injured people in the community which I understand is quite a large number. I do not know what your estimates are of the number, but there is a very high number of brain-injured people estimated by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, is there not? Some \$54 million has been allocated over four years for supported accommodation. How much of that will go to brain-injured people?

Ms HAMMERTON: I will take that question on notice, because I am not aware of any of the institutions we are talking about being specifically for people with brain injury.

The Hon. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: They do not have to be specifically for people with brain injury. The clinical picture may be the same as with those with other causes, presumably, in some cases.

Ms HAMMERTON: We will take the question on notice.

CHAIR: Does the Government consider that acquired brain injury is a disability?

Ms HAMMERTON: Acquired brain injury is a disability. The Government, through a range of ways, over time has been supporting people with acquired brain injury. In various ways through the Home and Community Care program people get access to support—and/or their families. Additionally, through the creation of the new service access system that we are working hard to fine-tune and implement very shortly, that process will make possible access on a prioritised basis to services like supported accommodation for people who qualify.

The Hon. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Does this mean that there is a brain-injury action plan?

Ms HAMMERTON: There have been plans in the past. I need to say that there is a great deal of co-operation between the agencies involved in providing services to people with brain injury, but there does not necessarily need to be a separate brain-injury action plan, if it can be demonstrated that the supports they need alongside people with other kinds of disabilities are able to be accessed through the systems that are there for them to use.

The Hon. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So they would sit back and tack on to other systems—

Ms HAMMERTON: They already do.

The Hon. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: where support mechanisms might have lasted for a whole lifetime, whereas these are coming on later, presumably with different sorts of problems? Are you saying they simply go into the same pool?

Ms HAMMERTON: But these people have been around for some time. As we know, there have been accidents and injuries that have resulted in acquired brain injury for some time. Yes, we do know something

about the statistics and we do know that, once people have an acquired brain injury, they have it for the rest of their lives. It generally happens to young men aged between 18 and 24 for a range of reasons, and they are therefore with us and tend to live long and healthy lives. A lot of research and legwork has gone on around planning. The challenge is to ensure that our health and special support systems are able to be accessed by these people and that their needs are prioritised relative to others. That is what I am saying: the service access system will make it possible for people with an acquired brain injury to be considered in a way that they may not have felt they had a chance in the past.

CHAIR: At what stage do such people cease being Health patients and become a DOCS responsibility?

Ms HAMMERTON: They are not.

CHAIR: I am sorry: I mean the responsibility of ADD.

Ms HAMMERTON: Yes, exactly. They are not a DOCS responsibility as such. Once they have moved through various stages of rehabilitation and are ready to move back into the community, that is clearly where some transition happens. But it does not necessarily mean that they go straight into any system that ADD might happen to fund. A lot of people with acquired brain injury go back into their home arrangements and do not need support. Some people are funded through a compensation payout and we know that those payouts do not necessarily last either, so there is a question mark about making sure that that part of another system looks at that issue. That is why I said that it is very important that we have a group of very senior bureaucrats from the agencies concerned who plan jointly around service systems to ensure that measures that are taken on all fronts are coherent.

CHAIR: You said before that there is a prioritisation of need. That indicates to me that you must have an idea of current unmet needs. What inquiries have you undertaken, and what is the level of unmet need?

Ms HAMMERTON: There is a range of ways you can look at the unmet need question.

CHAIR: No. What inquiries have you undertaken to ascertain the level?

Ms HAMMERTON: We have been part of the disability service administrators group, and last year the Commonwealth produced a report that informed us about a level of unmet need. I am just trying to make sure I get the figures available right.

CHAIR: You can take the question on notice if you wish.

Ms HAMMERTON: No, I have the information here somewhere. I am making sure I can read alphabetically. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report was presented a couple of years ago. It made an estimate that recurrent funding of \$293.8 million per annum was required and that of this cost a third, approximately \$100 million, is for service provision in New South Wales.

That is one indicator only, but when you consider that this Government is putting in \$65 million in the new year ahead and add to that the Commonwealth's unmet need offer that has been accepted by the Government of \$16.84 million, it is starting to make very serious inroads into that unmet need picture. Our concern is that the picture of unmet need changes and so why we have stopped and said we need to make sure we have a service access system that works across the range of people with disabilities to ensure that, of the dollars that are available, there is relative prioritisation going on, and that people know where they stand. Therefore, we are moving away from the current situation whereby a family and/or individual gets some attention as a result of a crisis response.

The Hon. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Could I ask about groups that have not been funded—

CHAIR: No, we are asking about the issue of unmet need.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: How many minutes do we get?

CHAIR: The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans will commence his questioning at 9.30 p.m. precisely.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: How many minutes will the Hon. A. G. Corbett get?

CHAIR: We will come back to him.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: In relation to unmet need, in 1998 the Government allocated, or promised, 63 packages of accommodation for people with disabilities. As I understand it, there are still 11 individuals waiting for accommodation. Why is that so and when do you anticipate that those 11, identified as high priority in 1998, will be given their funding package support?

Ms HAMMERTON: There have been complexities around those 11, so it is not for want of trying to ensure that we are working with the family and possible providers to make sure that we get the best possible outcome. But the circumstances of those individuals have changed too, so it is not as if you are talking about a static situation. Others have also emerged over time. What we have done—a lot of learning around our processes; our expression of interest processes—we use to try to make sure we come up with a good match for the person with a service package response.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: So when you allocate those packages—you announced that there would be 63 packages—do you allocate the funding or is that funding held while you sort out the complexities regarding these 11 people?

Ms HAMMERTON: Yes, that is not lost. Their priority has been established.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Minister, could you describe briefly the type of children who end up in foster care?

Mrs LO PO': There are so many variations on the theme. There are children who are at risk, which means that they have difficulty living with the people who are purported to care for them—and I will ask Carmel to deal with this. However, in my experience—and you have all heard me say this on radio because I find it so horrifying that I keep saying it—they range from children who are at immediate risk of being emotionally or physically scarred. They are children who, at the age of five, have genital warts and at the age of two have gonorrhoea of the throat. We are talking about the worst things you can think of having been done to a child. I went to a hospital recently and met a child there who, at the age of five months, had had her hand held in a pot of boiling water. We have children who have had cigarettes ashed out on their body in a pattern. As a person ashes out his or her cigarettes, the child screams and writhes in pain—which no doubt gives that person some sort of pleasure.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Would you call them mongrels?

Mrs LO PO': I am not allowed to say here.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: I get the idea. Obviously a lot of children who end up in foster care would have, to put it mildly, challenging sorts of behaviours that require special behaviour management strategies. Does the department assist foster carers in this area?

Mrs LO PO': Yes, it does, and we are aware of that. When we do our ads for foster carers, we say up front in the ad: "These children don't come tied up with a pink ribbon. They have challenging behaviours". So we never hide this from the foster carers, they would only have to be with them a day and they would know anyhow, but there is support given to foster carers who take on these challenging children. My aim is to try to get these children before they turn three because the damage is done in the first three years. If we can get them away from these toxic families and put them in a permanent placement where they have a family of their own, where they can grow up being loved and learning how to love, we will have done them a favour.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Minister, I am well aware of that because I have a report in my office by the Carnegie Corporation that was written in the late 1980s and they were saying exactly the same thing in the late 1980s. It is true, that the department has a policy for foster carers that they cannot apply corporal punishment?

Mrs LO PO': I will let Carmel handle that one.

Ms NILAND: There is a policy about corporal punishment.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Foster carers are not allowed to use it?

Ms NILAND: It is actually quite a complex policy which encourages foster carers to use a whole range of methods to modify children's behaviour when the behaviour is inappropriate.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: The policy specifically says—and I have seen it—that they are not to use corporal punishment.

Ms NILAND: That is correct, and they are told that.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Is it a fact that earlier this year or late last year the department actually looked at the possibility of giving foster carers the right to apply corporal punishment to foster children?

Ms NILAND: I might take that on notice, but can I just say this: Since the time that I have been in the department, which is two and a bit years, I am not aware that we have considered that.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Would you categorically rule that out because of the type of children that the Minister was talking about, they have already suffered enough, they have already been hurt enough and for a foster parent to use corporal punishment might just exacerbate the problem?

Ms NILAND: Are you speaking to me as a director-general or as a psychologist? I could give you an answer from both perspectives.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: I would like an official answer from the department.

Mrs LO PO': It is going to be government policy, not department policy.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: All right. I direct that question to you, Minister.

Mrs LO PO': Ask me the question again, please.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Do you categorically rule out the possibility that foster carers would be able to use corporal punishment on a child they have under their care?

Mrs LO PO': At the moment they cannot and I am not aware that we are going to change those rules. But I am not ruling out anything.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: I would like to know—the Director-General has said that she would take that question on notice—whether that issue was discussed in the department because I heard that the department was looking into it.

CHAIR: On that issue, what is the estimate of the full cost of implementing the new child protection legislation? It goes to this issue that you are talking about: early intervention and the like.

Ms NILAND: The 2000-01 State budget has allocated \$5.59 million towards the implementation of the Act. This will enable the establishment of the children's guardian, the funding of alternative dispute resolution, compulsory assistant orders and leaving and after-care services. In the last financial year, that is 1999-2000, \$7.834 million recurrent funding was provided towards the implementation of the new Act and an additional \$300,000 has been provided as one-off capital for the establishment of the office of child care. Is that sufficient?

CHAIR: Has the department made any estimate of the extra cost for NGOs following the implementation of the new Act—in other words, the extra costs involved in training the people who will care for children under the new child protection legislation, in preparing them for the legislation, in putting in place the accountability procedures and so on?

Ms NILAND: We have been providing the training so far under our process that is called "enact"—the process of bringing in the new Act.

CHAIR: Is that included in the money you told us about?

Ms NILAND: Yes, we have been providing for the non-government sector in that.

CHAIR: There is no extra money in grants for the implementation?

Ms NILAND: No, there is no extra money in grants.

CHAIR: My last question is: Are you aware that recently the Southern Sydney Development Disability Service wrote to people accessing respite beds at the Arncliffe Adult Respite Service cancelling their respite because of blocked beds? How long has this service been blocked? What steps have you taken to unblock those beds?

Mrs LO PO': This sounds like a serious matter and we will take this on notice and get you an answer immediately. Would you repeat the name?

CHAIR: Arncliffe Adult Respite. The general question then is how many respite beds are blocked by permanent placements, what percentage of available respite beds does that include, how many additional respite beds are required to meet demand and what would be the shortfall in service even after the new respite beds announced recently?

Ms HAMMERTON: There are a number of aspects to that. I will go back to the first one: the level of blocked respite beds. The picture varies at any point in time. We are currently working with DOCS because we had a picture of the blocked respite beds in about February, when we had been through an assessment process of having applied the crisis protocol analysis jointly. So indicatively it is under 100, as I understand it, for the DOCS facilities. Money has been made available through the new budget to unblock those beds obviously as fast as we can possibly do it. A priority elsewhere—

CHAIR: Do you receive some Federal funding for that?

Ms HAMMERTON: No, there is a pool of \$20 million, which was derived from the learning that we jointly undertook to understand who was either in the DOCS system as a result of a crisis, who came to them out of a crisis placement, or who is known to DOCS. That exercise took place in December, January and February. We have a database about who is in blocked respite beds, which we are updating now because a couple of other things have happened. First, the Minister has considered the findings of a respite working party and accepted those findings. That has given us guidance as to how we want to unfold the whole respite strategy. Secondly, we are about to appoint a respite co-ordinator in my organisation to make sure that we oversight the planning of those processes in a co-ordinated and planned way. We know, through that exercise, that the DOCS beds will get unblocked very quickly—obviously as soon as we can work through those processes. Knowing the individuals, and in view of the strong commitment from both departments, we will do that as soon as possible.

The question about when enough respite is enough is hard to answer, simply because families often indicate needs in terms of respite when that may not be the need they want met—for example, a more appropriate option might be a supported accommodation solution for that particular circumstance. It is through our regional planning process, our population group analysis of supply and demand and through our extensive regional consultations that, for the first time, are coming together as we speak into regional plans that we will put to the Minister in July for sign-off. We have local advice and input as to what is needed to shape and improve the service system and how we will apply those new dollars to make a difference when it comes to respite. Indicatively, we have already come up with allocations for regions so that money can flow out in that direction.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Will those respite and regional plans be public?

Ms HAMMERTON: The regional plans will certainly be public.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Will the respite report be public?

Ms HAMMERTON: That is the Minister's call.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The Minister may answer that question. Will it be available?

Mrs LO PO': I will take question that on notice. I do not know what status it has.

Ms HAMMERTON: It certainly involved a range and a true cross-section of parties. It is already guiding the current expression-of-interest process, which will come to an end shortly .

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It has numbers in it?

Ms HAMMERTON: Yes, it has some numbers in it.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: We will look forward to it.

Ms NILAND: Dr Pezzutti, would you like me to answer, on behalf of DOCS, the question about block respite funds?

CHAIR: No. Would you mind putting that answer in writing? I have heard a lot about respite funds from the other workers.

Ms NILAND: Yes.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I would like to follow up the Hon. A. G. Corbett's questions about notifications that are deemed unnecessary for a field response. These are unallocated cases, is that correct? Is it true that those cases stay with an assistant manager and may be closed in four weeks if there is no new notification?

Ms NILAND: Some would fit into that category, yes. Some would not fit into that category.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In an unallocated case, how do they decide which ones are closed in four weeks and which ones are not?

Ms NILAND: They look to a number of risk factors, one of which would be: Is there another notification? I will go through some risk factors off the top of my head. Let us say, for example, it involved the child of a mother who was under the age of 20, or a child in which one of the birth parents had a mental illness or there was domestic violence in the family. That indicates a risk, and therefore that case may not be closed. It may move up in priority.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Would all this be known if there had not been a field visit? Presumably a case that has a notification may have selected information in it.

Ms NILAND: It is a notification, but I think that the word "unallocated" is most misleading. When a case is—to use our terminology—"unallocated", it comes in through intake and there may be a number of hours, or even days, work done on that case. A proper assessment of that case is done. The case is considered by an assistant manager, usually in conjunction with a district officer, and preliminary work is done on it. No other system would call it "unallocated", and it is a most unfortunate term because it gives the impression that something has come in, someone has literally just glanced at it, and then it has been put in a pile somewhere and left. That is not how the system operates.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If nothing further is done, is it not a bit like someone calling the fire brigade?

Ms NILAND: I know who you have been listening to.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If there was no second call, the case would potentially drop off the register in four weeks. Is that correct?

Ms NILAND: No, it would not. I thought that the Community Services Commissioner's fire analogy was completely inappropriate.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I am sorry, I did not realise that he had used it. I thought it was quite new.

Ms NILAND: No, it was mentioned on the ABC on Sunday.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Under the Priority One policy, the assistant manager can sign and these unallocated cases simply disappear, is that correct?

Ms NILAND: They do not disappear, but they be closed at that time.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do they go to an archive somewhere?

Ms NILAND: No, they are on the client information system.

CHAIR: Is this the antiquated one that is running down?

Ms NILAND: It is antiquated, Dr Pezzutti. It is actually a pre-Word system. Computer students use it as an archeological dig because it is the only known pre-Word system fully operating in Sydney. We are on the tour guide site.

CHAIR: That is disgraceful. What is Kim Yeadon doing about it?

Ms NILAND: What did you do about it?

CHAIR: You have been there for five years.

Ms NILAND: Yes, and we picked up a system that was not worth a crumpet.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You have a Minister—Kim Yeadon—who says he is IT proficient, and he has the only known archeological IT site in the world under his very nose.

Ms NILAND: We have moved millions of dollars into it and it will be changed. Your system was not flash; not only was it not flash—

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But five years!

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: Can we stop this bickering please?

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Are there regular performance statistics regarding unallocated cases and what happens to them?

Ms NILAND: Of course.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I understand that, under Priority One, there are meetings between the Deputy Director-General and the area managers. Do these statistics about unallocated cases come out then? Are they discussed regularly at those meetings?

Ms NILAND: I am not present at those meetings, so I cannot answer that question. I will take that question on notice and get back to you.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I am correct, am I not? Does the Deputy Director-General meet regularly with the area managers?

Ms NILAND: That was our practice.

CHAIR: Is it not your practice now?

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is that not still your practice? It started in 1998 under Priority One, is that not correct? Is it not ongoing?

Ms NILAND: We no longer have area managers; we have area directors. Over this year, we have been changing the way in which we operate. So that particular practice, whereby the Deputy Director-General meets with them, is no longer current. It ceased to be current in January this year.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Okay. On page 2 of the publication "Response Issues Raised by Peak Agencies, 6th March 2000"—which is some two years after the issues were raised—there is the title "Review of Community Services grants programs to better target resources and build up social capital". Is this review a public document, and could you table it?

Ms NILAND: Could you repeat that title?

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: "Review of Community Service Grants programs to better target resources and build up social capital".

Ms NILAND: It is a work in progress at the moment.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: This was a response to issues raised by peak agencies on 6 March.

Ms NILAND: Right.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It is a response to peak agencies two years after the issues were raised. Therefore, one would expect it to contain a response—part of which is the review of Community Services grants. Are you saying that that report is not available?

Ms NILAND: If there is a report, I do not know it by that name. So we have been working—

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I can check the title and get back to you, if you like.

Ms NILAND: I think that would be best.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That would be better. I am concerned about staff turnover in your department. What is the current average length of service for a district officer?

Ms NILAND: I will take that question on notice, but I can speak to it generally. The staff turnover rate has been reduced for the permanent officers to around 5 per cent. For permanent officers across the public service in professional categories, the turnover rate is about per cent. So our rate is 1 per cent below that.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What percentage of your officers are permanent?

Ms NILAND: What percentage of the 850?

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What percentage of the district officers? If they were all casual, presumably the 5 per cent turnover of permanent staff would be an irrelevant statistic.

Ms NILAND: I will give you an approximate answer. If there are approximately 850 officers, one would expect that about 50 of those would be temporary and about 800 would be permanent.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Are you saying that 800 of 850 are permanent, and that the turnover of the 800 is 5 per cent per year?

Ms NILAND: That is correct—it is exceptionally low.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It is exceptionally low. How many district officers leave within twelve months of their appointment?

Ms NILAND: I cannot answer that question off the top of my head, but I will take it on notice.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The die-hards might stay on, but there is a huge churn in your short-term appointments.

Ms NILAND: I think we have high mobility among the younger district officers who are with us for 12 or 24 months, but I do not know off the top of my head what that churn rate is.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you take into account internal transfers, acting in higher duties and secondment in this measure of leaving? People who get stressed out are presumably transferred to other parts.

Ms NILAND: I will take question that on notice.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Will you take on notice the question about whether internal replacements, promotions or whatever are reasons for your people not staying on as district officers?

Ms NILAND: We have full data available on that, which comes out quarterly. I am only too happy to let you have a look at it.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Thank you. Since exit interviews were introduced in 1998, how many interviews have been done and has there been a report of them?

Ms NILAND: Once again, I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Okay. Is it true that an exit interview sheet including tick boxes about why people left the department was not produced until 31 May 2000?

Ms NILAND: The exit interview was developed in about August-September 1998. I am happy to give you a copy of the exit interview and to show you when it was produced.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: When was it made available generally?

Ms NILAND: The moment it is produced it is available on the intranet, so anyone can download it any time they have to do an exit interview.

CHAIR: But my computer is not pre-Word.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: How many district officer positions are currently vacant?

Ms NILAND: I will take that question on notice too.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: How many Aboriginal positions are currently vacant?

Ms NILAND: The same.

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

CHAIR: So two questions have been taken on notice.

The Hon. H. TSANG: It is more than that.

CHAIR: Two more.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: How many laptops have been bought for use by field officers?

Ms NILAND: Four hundred and fifty.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Are the officers taking these home to work on with confidential files on them?

Ms NILAND: That was the purpose of providing them with laptops. The nature of their field work means that they are away from the office. We have arranged for them to have remote access, so they can access email or whatever through the laptop. The idea is that they work on those away from their desk. The system on the laptops has lots of security bars, and I am confident—if the crux of your question is about confidentially—that they will be handled in the way they should be. However, officers do not have access to the client information system on their laptops; they can access only their own work.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The publication "Response to Issues Raised by Peak Agencies, 6th March 2000", states on page 10 that the court liaison officer model was expanded to four other locations. Could you tell me what those locations are?

Ms NILAND: We had Newcastle, and it was expanded to Campbelltown, Blacktown, I think the Wollongong court, and one other location. I will have to take the rest of that question on notice.

CHAIR: That is another question on notice.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Have the fears of district officers about de-skilling been addressed?

Ms NILAND: I am sorry: de-skilling in what way?

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: De-skilling in relation to other people taking parts of their jobs?

Ms NILAND: They did not take parts of their jobs.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Could I ask a question about the Department for Women? In answer to the budget estimates hearing, the departmental spokesman, Ms Henderson, stated that the department might occasionally provide unsolicited advice to the Minister on certain issues. Given the very public campaign in opposition to the new women's prison at Windsor, has the department provided any information to the Minister about the effect of increased gaol capacity on women offenders?

Ms HENDERSON: The answer is no.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Why not?

Ms HENDERSON: The department's view was to specifically encourage Parliament to await the outcome of that inquiry.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Did you not want to give evidence to that inquiry?

Ms HENDERSON: The department's view is that that was being adequately provided by other agencies within government.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If that is the case, what involvement has the department had in the planning process of the new gaol to date?

Ms HENDERSON: The department itself has had no involvement. There have been some discussions with a number of members of the Premier's Council for Women, as they conducted consultations around the State, about some of the issues that were raised.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Could you detail the involvement and community consultation that the department and/or the Minister undertook as part of that process?

Ms HENDERSON: The department undertook no consultation as part of that process. The issues that were raised in relation to the women's prison and women in prison generally were raised during general consultations with the community.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Given the interaction between prisons and the work of your department, do you think it would have been appropriate to comment about prison planning and the increase in prisoner numbers?

Ms HENDERSON: As I said, the department's view was that the inquiry was going to raise significant issues and identify strategies. The department is, of course, involved in cross-agency discussions and committees with the Department of Corrective Services—including a committee that is looking at the number of women prisoners—but the department provided no evidence to the inquiry.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: No, I knew that much.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Minister, this is the sixth budget of the Carr Government and I notice that the Women's Grants program is still \$1 million. One million dollars was the amount originally allocated by the Coalition Government. Does that mean that, under the Carr Government, you are effectively downgrading support to community women's groups?

Mrs LO PO': No, not at all. This is probably one of the most effective ways to effect change in communities for women. We have changed the way in which the amounts of money work. We have large grants and smaller grants, which gives—

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: It is still only \$1 million.

Mrs LO PO': Yes, it is still only \$1 million but it gives more people an opportunity. Instead of having large grants—which give access to only half a dozen communities—we have larger grants and smaller grants. Some people need only \$5,000 or \$6,000 and other large groups get up to around \$120,000 or whatever. I defend the Women's Grants program; it certainly has an incredible effect across the State of New South Wales.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Minister, in your bids on the budget, did you request an increase in the Women's Grants program?

Mrs LO PO': Anybody who knows Ministers will be aware that they are avaricious at budget time and request money for everything.

CHAIR: Ms Niland, do you have answers to the questions that you originally took on notice from the Hon. Patricia Forsythe regarding the sources of all that funding?

Ms NILAND: I must return to the Hon. Patricia Forsythe and ask: Can you define what you mean by early intervention? If you can, we must then look across three different programs and give an approximation of the amount.

CHAIR: That is right. We will now take that question on notice?

Ms NILAND: Yes.

CHAIR: The second question involved the issue of respite. Do you have something you can table or do you need to get back to us again?

Ms NILAND: On the question of respite, do you mean respite in disability—the unblocking?

CHAIR: Yes, the unblocking.

Ms NILAND: I have some information, but it is just a fragment that refers to the number of people we have in respite. The \$20 million that is coming to us through ADD will mean that 195 clients will obtain recurrent supportive accommodation packages. Of those 195 clients, 70 will move out of DOCS with block respite services.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: I have a very important question, Minister: Non-government services have been offered indexation at the rate of only 1 to 2 per cent, depending on the program, when Treasury has indicated a rate of inflation of about 6 per cent for this year because of the one-off impact of the GST. What impact will this have on the viability of non-government services?

Mrs LO PO': In talking about the GST, I gave an answer before. The Government will increase by 10 per cent all grants to charities and community organisations that are registered for the GST. But the next part is important: those non-profit organisations providing human services to disadvantaged people in communities will be allowed to keep the benefits of the savings that will come from the removal of the embedded wholesale sales tax. So they will be able to keep that money and use it for themselves.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: What would that tax apply to? What sorts of things are we looking at?

CHAIR: Baked beans?

Mrs LO PO': Yes, food—whatever they buy that the GST applies to.

The Hon. A. G. CORBETT: I was just looking for some examples.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: With regard to the Families First program, why has the department chosen not to fund or to give more funding to the core services of the State's 160 family support agencies from the growth money available to family services, especially when many of these services have very long waiting lists?

Mrs LO PO': Family support services provide practical support and counselling to families under stress or in crisis and are funded by the Community Services Grants program. In 2000-01, \$68.572 million has been granted

to the Community Services Grants program. Base funding of \$170,712 was allocated to the family support services for 1999-2000, which will be increased by \$183,800 for 2000-01. In 1999-2000, it is estimated that the Department of Community Services will provide base funding of \$161,489 to the Family Support Services Association and \$18.262 million to family support services. The funding is made available through the Community Services Grants program, and I have approved an additional recurrent funding of \$20,000 to the association to fund additional hours for the executive and training officer. To date, I have approved funding for 26 new services to be established under Families First. Sixteen of these new services are to be provided by family support services, with grants totalling \$684,000.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What is that as a percentage increase on last year, roughly?

Mrs LO PO': I will take that question on notice. I cannot do that in my head.

CHAIR: Can I ask a question on that issue of Carmel Niland? What discussions have you had with Treasury concerning the further contracting out of substitute care services in order to produce budget savings by cutting DOCS officers working in child protection?

Ms NILAND: I have not had any discussions with Treasury in that regard.

CHAIR: That information is in a document that was inadvertently tabled.

Ms NILAND: Are you talking about in the last 12 months?

CHAIR: No, it must have been leading up to 1998-99?

Ms NILAND: That is an old document. After that document there were no further discussions.

CHAIR: So the Treasury has not come back to you asking you to cut DOCS officers to a true budget?

Mrs LO PO': Definitely not.

The Hon. Dr. A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 granted important new functions to the children's guardian to oversee the existing services providing children and young people with home care. The funds were allocated in the 1999-2000 budget to establish the children's guardian's function and position. This establishment is yet to occur. Can the Minister indicate the level of funds allocated to establishing the children's guardian's functions in the 1999-2000 budget, the level of unspent funds for this purpose projected to 30 June, the level of funds allocated to the establishment of the children's guardian's functions in the 2000-01 budget, and the estimated number of positions, their grade, the agency located within government structures and the management arrangements regarding the children's guardian's functions?

Mrs LO PO': You are going well, but I will have to take that question on notice.

CHAIR: That question will also be taken on notice. It now being 10 o'clock, I would like to thank your officers and the Directors-General for their attendance today. A number of questions taken on notice and will be forwarded to you on Friday, I think. We would like your responses and any corrections returned to us in a couple of days, please—perhaps by Tuesday of next week.

Mrs LO PO': I understand.

CHAIR: Any other questions from honourable members will be tabled. Supplementary questions will be handed in to the clerks by close of business tomorrow and should be transmitted to you on Friday. Do you have any other questions before we go?

Mrs LO PO': No, thank you.

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
