

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 2

Monday, 29 August 2016

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES, SOCIAL HOUSING

CORRECTED PROOF

The Committee met at 09:00

MEMBERS

The Hon. G. Donnelly (Chair)

Dr M. Faruqi
The Hon. P. Green
The Hon. M. Mason-Cox
The Hon. Dr. P Phelps
Mr D. Shoebridge
The Hon. B. Taylor
The Hon. L. Voltz

PRESENT

The Hon. Brad Hazzard, *Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Social Housing*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing of the inquiry into budget estimates 2016-17. Before I commence I acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of the land. I also pay respects to the elders, past and present, of the Eora nation and extend that respect to Aboriginal persons present today, witnesses and others. I welcome to the hearing the Hon. Brad Hazzard, Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Social Housing, together with accompanying officials. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Family and Community Services, and Social Housing.

Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. The transcript of today's hearing will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, while members of the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography.

I also remind media representatives that you must take responsibility for what you publish about the Committee's proceedings today. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside their evidence at this hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they may make to the media or to others after they have completed their evidence, as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take action for defamation. The Guidelines for Broadcasting Proceedings are available from the secretariat.

There may be some questions that a witness could only answer if they had more time or with certain documents at hand. In those circumstances, witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any messages from advisors or members' staff who are seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Committee secretariat. I remind the Minister and the officers accompanying him that they are free to pass notes and to refer directly to their advisers seated at the table behind them. Transcripts of the hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning.

Finally, with respect to mobile phones, I invite people to check their mobile phones to make sure that they are turned off or set on silent. All witnesses from departments, social bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath of office as a member of Parliament.

JACQUELINE MAREE WALK, Deputy Secretary, Program and Service Design, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined

MICHAEL PAUL COUTTS-TROTTER, Secretary, Department of Family and Community Services, sworn and examined

PAUL VEVERS, Deputy Secretary, Southern Cluster, Department of Family and community Services, sworn and examined

DEIDRE MULKERIN, Deputy Secretary, Western Cluster, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined

MARGARET ANNE SKEWES, Deputy Secretary, Land and Housing Corporation, affirmed and examined

SHANE ALLAN HAMILTON, Chief Executive, Aboriginal Housing Office, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I declare the hearing into proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Family and Community Services, and Social Housing open for examination. The questioning of the portfolio of Family and Community Services will run from now, five minutes past nine, to 10.00 a.m. The questioning of the portfolio of Social Housing will run from 10.00 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. As there is no provision for a Minister to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questioning, we will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Minister, in the *Daily Telegraph* today you say that you have asked the Royal Commission into Child Abuse to expand its previous investigation to consider the particular circumstances of that residential facility. Given this matter has already been before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in March 2015, why is it being referred back?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: First of all, can I say that the circumstances in relation to that young child are very sad and very disturbing and as a result of my concerns about that particular case, but also some information that was given to me in the last week about another two allegations of what I would consider to be similar circumstances, I determined that the matter was best dealt with by the royal commission. That is a difficult issue because the other two matters are allegations and they have not been confirmed obviously, no-one has been found guilty.

Mr David SHOEBRIDGE: The same child, Minister?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No.

Mr David SHOEBRIDGE: At the same facility?

The CHAIR: Just a moment, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: As a result, I spoke to the royal commission myself and indicated my concerns about that particular facility. Keep in mind that the circumstances are historic—they are three or four years ago. And what I am told by Family and Community Services [FACS]—and I also personally spoke to the Ombudsman and the Children's Guardian; and keep in mind that the Children's Guardian is the regulator, the Ombudsman is the oversight body—is that the regulatory authorities are satisfied that the particular facility currently complies with their requirements. My view was, well, that may be the case but the circumstances were such that I felt the royal commission would at least be able to look at it in a more comprehensive way, bringing together all of the various government and non-government agencies, to look at whether there were any improvements.

I think it is important that not only is that facility working but we have to make sure that, whatever the systemic issues are—if there are such issues—they can be addressed throughout the residential care sector. I am also very conscious, having been the former shadow Minister and dealing currently with other jurisdictions in Australia, that similar situations have occurred in other States and Territories and, in fact, there is a similar situation that was the subject of a recent inquiry in the United Kingdom [UK]. So my feeling was that, in view of the expertise of the royal commission, in view of the fact they are looking at systemic issues across sexual abuse involving children, that it was a sensible thing to do. I think that the community would agree with that and I know that the royal commission agreed.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Let us have a look at what happened in March 2015 in the royal commission. This is what the organisation said, "The staff member case I can tell you because we are not investigating the case but I am very happy to." The commissioner said, "Let me stop you there."

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am sorry, I did not hear you. Could you repeat that please?

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: This is what was said at the royal commission by the organisation:

The staff member case I can tell you because we are not investigating the case but I am very happy to.

They were interrupted.

Let me stop you there, are you saying the staff member was the offender or was the—

And the organisation said:

The staff member was not convicted of an offence. What happened is, there was an allegation against the staff member. The police investigated this. The police dropped the charges but we sustained the allegation, not just on the grounds of the police investigation but because this person had breached the guidelines and responsibilities they had.

The commissioner said:

Of the 24 allegations that were not sustained, did you report each of them to FACS?

The organisation said:

FACS were aware of every allegation that has been made.

So you said last week you were informed of another two matters, why were you not informed at the time?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I cannot answer that. If I knew that—

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Were they included in the 24 allegations that had been reported to Family and Community Services [FACS]?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I preface this by saying I wanted a royal commission. I do not know what the royal commission has looked at. I can share this with you, about August last year, not August this year, I was concerned about allegations. They were not related to this particular facility as I recollect. I cannot recall who made the allegations. It may have been a letter from somebody. I receive regular letters from people concerned about all sorts of issues. I recollect there being sufficient concern in my mind that I went personally to the royal commission in August 2015, a few months after I became Minister in this area. I raised with the royal commission allegations with regard to issues to do with residential care and the model of residential care and the challenges of dealing with these young people.

Most of the children in residential care are obviously extremely challenged in their behaviour, let us say, and that is why they are not in home foster care. It is very difficult for each of these organisations, whoever it be, to manage their behaviour, more often than not. Quite often they are extremely rebellious and have normal teenager-type activity except far worse, in a sense. This particular allegation concerned young people involving themselves in things they should not have been involved in. I went to the royal commission and suggested that they look at residential care broadly. I have not been personally involved in that. What discussions may have taken place between the royal commission and Family and Community Services or other non-government agencies I am not aware of.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: We know that there were 24 allegations. This case can hardly come as a surprise to you. Other than going to the royal commission and saying to expand and look at this—which you have already looked at—what have you done?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The allegations you are talking about I cannot comment on those. That is something between the royal commission and whoever you were referring to.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: It includes the case that you are asking the royal commission into child abuse to expand its previous investigation.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You can press me on that but I have given you an answer, I do not know. I spoke to the royal commission in August last year and I raised the issue and I raised the issue again with the royal commission last week and I cannot answer more than that.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: The royal commission has looked at this.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I appreciate your view.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: You must be aware of the 24 allegations against the organisation. I am asking what action you took.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I appreciate your view. With the greatest respect, the fact that the royal commission and commissioner running the royal commission is thinking that it is appropriate to take it. That is the view that the community would prefer to accept.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Have you done anything other than ring the royal commission?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Obviously.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Explain to us what you have done?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have had constant communications with FACS about that particular case once I became aware in the last week that there were other issues. The only notifications I had up to that point was the Coroner's inquiry. That is the position. Can I say there have been a lot of things done by the Ombudsman, the Children's Guardian and the Government. For example, the national police check was introduced at my direction some months ago; the Working With Children Check has been upgraded; there has been some legislation which your party kindly agreed to. Can I remind you remind you, Ms Voltz, other than the changes we made to improve it, there were those that existed under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998—

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: You have one organisation with 24 allegations.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Mr Chair, I have to be allowed to answer the question and if I am going to be interrupted that is not appropriate.

The CHAIR: Please continue.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The legislation was introduced by your Government and existed from 1998. The changes that have been made to improve the circumstances were made on this Government's watch and there are always learnings in this area—and one would expect there would be learnings in this area. There are learnings from New South Wales, other States and Territories and overseas. Those learning are what saw those recent changes and in addition the permanency placement principles. It is not easy. It is not something that is simple or something any jurisdiction has been able to completely address because of the nature of the young people we are dealing with. What the Government has done is as good as it can get, short of what further recommendations may come out of the Coroner's hearing into the unfortunate death of that young child and the royal commission investigations.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Minister, other than constant communications with FACS, have you reviewed the contract that is given to the operator in question?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The contractual arrangements that currently exist were contracts that came out of your Government. Your Government engaged this particular agency. Being fair about it, this particular agency has been engaged since 1896 to provide out-of-home care in New South Wales. This particular charitable organisation has one residential care facility which also operated throughout your Government, as I understand it. Their particular facility obviously is one that the Coroner will be looking at closely as well as the royal commission. Having said that, my inclination has been to indicate to the department that I have an extremely high level of concern. Whether or not I should share the extent of that with you, I do not think I should.

The department understands my high level of concern. The department has confirmed to me that they have been in constant communication with the regulator, the Children's Guardian, and with the Ombudsman, and both of them are currently satisfied with the regulatory framework and oversight of that particular facility. I have personally spoken to the Ombudsman and the Children's Guardian and they have confirmed that to me. Does that mean I am satisfied? No, I am not. I have ongoing discussions with the department about the appropriateness of that particular facility.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: You say you are not satisfied.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I did not say that; I have ongoing concerns.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Did you recently renew the contracts?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, I saw it written in the *Daily Telegraph*. I appreciate the work of the *Daily Telegraph* on this particular issue. The contractual issues are residual challenges that were left to us from the Labor Party.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: When was the contract renewed?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Excuse me?

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: It is a simple question, when was the contract renewed?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Point of order—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am happy to answer the questions, but unless Ms Voltz allows me to answer the question, and unless the Chair directs her to do that as Ms Voltz is not doing that at the moment, it is very hard for me to answer the question.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Point of order: The Minister must be allowed to finish answering the question without constant interjections.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: To the point of order: There is a requirement that Ministers answer the question asked of them. I have asked a simple question: Did the Minister recently renew the contract and when was the contract renewed? It is not a question that requires five minutes of waffle.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: To the point of order: The Minister was clearly answering the question.

The CHAIR: There is no point of order. A specific question was put to the Minister and the member is waiting for a specific answer.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Those contracts were put in place with that particular non-government organisation [NGO] by the Labor Party. All out-of-home care contracts were due for renewal as at 30 June last year. As Minister, I was unhappy about the outcomes for children in care. Work needs to be done to improve the outcomes. The contracts that were facilitated by Labor never looked at achieving outcomes. They were more process driven. I said to the department and to the sector that we would not renew a contract but would defer for one year the contractual matters that had been put in place under Labor, and we would have a discussion between the various service providers across the State and the Department of Family and Community Services [FACS] about how we could best achieve outcomes in the contract. That is a challenge. I pointed out to the department that I felt, as Minister, that in order to do that we had to engage the sector in a dialogue. There had to be a series of forums with the entire sector about the outcomes those agencies see as being reasonable, the outcomes we see as being reasonable and where the add item is in that.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I turn now to an internal email from your department. That internal email from one of your directors states—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: If you want me to discuss anything from an internal email you need to identify the email.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I want you to comment on this statement. I will happily give you a copy. It says:

For contractors it states that FACS cannot rely on agencies' declaration that their staff all have working with children checks and national criminal record check clearances.

If you are working with non-government organisations, why is one of your directors concerned about the clearances these agencies provide for their contractors?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: First of all, as with all parliamentary practice, you need to identify the date of the document, who it is from and who it is to. I do not intend to answer questions about matters that you—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: It is from the Director of the Cross Cluster Issues Management team.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What is the name, please?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Briony Foster.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Who is it to?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: It is to many people and it is dated 28 July 2016.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Would you please read it again in its entirety.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes. It says:

For contractors it states that FACS cannot rely on agencies' declaration that their staff all have working with children checks and national criminal record check clearances.

If you are not placing children when they need to be supervised individually, why is it that your director has concerns that the NGOs cannot be relied on to have working with children checks and national criminal record clearances?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I cannot comment on an individual officer. I can say that the previous working with children checks that were that were required under your Government, the Labor Government—

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: You have been in government for six years, mate. Blaming our Government is wearing pretty thin.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am not mate; I am Minister. I am giving you an answer, thank you. The previous working with children checks required that each employer undertake the investigations themselves. That was an unsatisfactory arrangement, which this Government recognised. The working with children checks were dramatically improved with amendments in 2013 requiring that each individual who wants to work with children has to apply to the Children's Guardian, as the regulator, for a Working With Children Check. The Children's Guardian then goes through rigorous set of checks, including police checks. As I said earlier, that has been upgraded in the past six to eight months to a national police check.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Yet one of your directors does not think that the NGOs can be relied on to show that this is being done for all their staff.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Ms Voltz, I have just answered that question.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: No. You have run through the procedure. I am saying that your director does not think that the NGOs can be relied upon to act on that. Does that not concern you?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have answered the question.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Do you accept that, on multiple occasions, children who have been taken into care have slept overnight in offices?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am advised by the department that if a risk of harm report is made to the helpline at midnight or one o'clock—or even earlier in the evening—a FACS caseworker has to go out to the property—

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: So you do accept it.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have not finished.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: I know, but I am asking whether you accept it.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You are being quite rude and you are cutting me off. I am happy to answer your questions but you have to show some courtesy to me. I am showing you courtesy. Show me courtesy, please. I do not mind answering the question now if the other Committee members do not mind.

The CHAIR: It is a specific question, Minister. Would you answer it, as it leads on to the next tranche of questions.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am advised that it has always been the practice, including under the former Labor Government, that if a child has to be removed at a time when a foster carer cannot be contacted—that is, at midnight or one o'clock—it is possible on occasion that the child might be taken to the office if they cannot be taken to a motel. It is rare.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Why was your director unaware of that?

The CHAIR: We have to move on. Minister, have you completed your answer?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes, thank you.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, are you aware of any cases like the Girl X case, where there have been such warning signs? If so, what is the Government doing about those cases?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What you mean by "such warning signs"?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Many issues have come to light through that case about levels of care and checks.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That matter is currently before the Coroner. It is not appropriate that I or any of us talk about the detail.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am not asking you to comment on that case, Minister. I am asking whether there are warning signs of other cases.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Two other matters were brought to my attention last week where there had been alleged serious sexual assaults by workers. As a result, I referred them to the royal commission.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am asking about process. What is the department doing to stop that from happening in the future?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No system anywhere in the world has managed to completely remove the risk of people abusing their position with children. That happens within the family; it happens outside the family. The intent of the Government and the department is to try to ensure that when children are placed in care they are placed in a safe environment.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Given the comments made by the Hon. Lynda Voltz, would you agree that they are not necessarily safe in the care of NGOs or in the care of a government department?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There is no way that anybody could absolutely guarantee it, but the measures that are in place in New South Wales currently, with the oversight of the Children's Guardian and the Ombudsman and the requirement for the upgraded working with children checks, are a substantial way of making sure that, as far as is practicable, the risk is minimised. The re-contracting with these organisations that the Hon. Lynda Voltz mentioned provides an opportunity for the department to make sure that there is a very clear understanding by the agencies that they have obligations and their contracts may be terminated if they do not take every humanly possible step to ensure that children are safeguarded.

The CHAIR: The Committee will hear questions from The Greens for 10 minutes then return to questions from the deputy chair.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, as at 2012, in what district was the facility where Girl X was assaulted? What FACS district was the facility covered by?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is within the Sydney region but I am not sure of the actual district. I will find out for you and let you know.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Perhaps Mr Coutts-Trotter may know. I know you were not the Minister in 2012.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The organisation structure changed, Mr Shoebridge, since that time so it would have been on a different configuration before my time. But we can get that information for the Committee.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In getting that information, will you advise the Committee whether that district, or that part of FACS, was accredited by the Children's Guardian as being a child-safe organisation?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I can confirm at the time, no, it was not. In the most recent accreditation decision by the Guardian, yes, it was. No FACS district was accredited at that point in time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is despite the fact that the process of accreditation started in 2003? So I suppose there is a very real concern that after nine years of going through accreditation no part of FACS as at 2012 had been accredited as child safe, and those are the very circumstances that led to allegations of abuse not being acted upon?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Mr Shoebridge, I share your concerns about that. Having said that, it is worth looking at the history of it, and that is this. In 1998 when bipartisan provisions—I think The Greens were with us and everybody in the Parliament was supportive of the Labor legislation, the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act—were in that Act, that actually set up for the first time anywhere in Australia—in fact, still nowhere else in Australia—a Children's Guardian. The concept was that the Children's Guardian would go forth and there would be accreditation processes from the then Labor Government for FACS. I was the shadow Minister at the time and I remember very well being outraged at the fact that they appointed a lady called Linda Mallett—who was an ex-FACS and a very esteemed and well-respected person—who spent 2½ to three years in an office getting about, I think it was, \$2.5 million a year—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, it is not a history lesson. Can we focus on 2012?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, you do need to understand this.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: As you know, we have a limited amount of time.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will try to say this as quickly as possible. The net result of that was that the Labor Government, for whatever reason—and I do not think it was actually a Labor political decision—made a decision not to do the accreditation process because they did not even get the Children's Guardian up and running. Sometime after about 2002-03 there were a succession of decisions made in FACS that delayed the accreditation process. In fact, nothing at all happened until the Coalition Government came into power in 2011. When Minister Goward found out that there had not been the work done on , she indicated work on accreditation would start.

What has happened in the past 4½ years is a lot of work has been done by FACS to do the accreditation because the Minister said, "You will do this." It has been challenging because they have, I think it is, 83 community service centres [CSC] across the State and they have 12 districts. To try to achieve that, working with the Guardian has been challenging. The latest advice I had only a couple of weeks ago was that they have now got all but three of the districts either accredited or substantially accredited. The final ones, both the Guardian and I have indicated to FACS they have three months to get it done. You might like to ask Mr Coutts-Trotter about whether they will achieve that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What are the three districts? Can you confirm that there are 1,200 children in those three districts which are not subject to child accreditation? The Guardian said that there was a substantial upheaval happening to those 1,200 children.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is true, Mr Shoebridge. Whilst that is the case—and I am not happy about that obviously, and I have indicated that to FACS in the strongest terms—I do not want to overly state the risk those children because those children are each with individual carers who have been often with either FACS or other non-government organisations where there seem to be very stable placements. I will ask Mr Coutts-Trotter if he would like to indicate what work is going on around the accreditation.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What are the districts?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I can tell you. One is South Eastern, is it?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: No, if I may.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes. Murrumbidgee?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes, it is Murrumbidgee, Western New South Wales and mid North Coast.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, I understand that there is a monitoring and evaluation program for the Going Home Staying Home program. Is that correct?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes, there is.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: What has that evaluation shown about the impact of the program specifically on service providers and especially on women-only service providers?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There has been a lot of consternation, as you would appreciate, in the changes. The basic concept was that there would be no wrong door. On the ground I visited some facilities that say that it is working really well. In other areas I think the consternation and concern have meant that on-the-ground groups have not worked as well together as they might otherwise have done. I think the problem with it, if I can say this, is that whilst it was well intended in a broader sense, small community-run groups that had worked together well felt that the contestability aspects of the process put them at loggerheads with each other. And that is essentially the message that is coming out: that they felt that work which they were doing for years together and which was working well had suddenly pitched them against each other.

I think there is a lesson in that—and I have said this to the department—that in any future changes that might be made the department and the government, whichever government, has to be sensitive to the fact that our best services are often delivered by the smaller community groups who really know their people and the connections on the ground. I think that is essentially the lessons. If the Secretary wants to add anything.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I want to ask a specific question. That is still on the process of how it all happened. What is the actual impact on the ground, for instance, for women who are fleeing domestic violence? We hear stories all the time about women being turned away from refuges. There are incidences of that. We know, for instance, from a media report just recently that the Government did not even know how many beds were available for women fleeing domestic violence. What is the program actually evaluating?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: In relation to the latter part of the question, obviously because of the on-the-ground consternation of groups who felt they should not have been put in a contest between each other, that has tended to colour—not necessarily wrongly, by the way; in some cases I absolutely agree with them personally that it did work against that sort of connectedness—the overall assessment. I am advised by FACS that the number of women's dedicated refuges, government and private, are still the same number.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Women only?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Women only, women and/or children. But that there are more people getting access to the range of services. Do you have the figures on that?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Minister, there are two elements to this question. There is an independent monitoring and evaluation committee chaired by, I think, it is Eileen Baldry, a highly respected researcher in the field.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do you know Eileen?

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I do know of Eileen, yes.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: She is really good.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: From Social Policy, University of New South Wales. Their first piece of work has been to commission, review and release an evaluation of the process of setting up the reforms.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Which was KPMG data as well. So are they repeating the process or is it the same one?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: No, that is the same one. The next phase is to actually begin to look at the results from the reforms for the people we serve, including women and children fleeing violence. I think that is due in September-October this year. We have initial data for the 2015-16 financial year which is gathered and fed back to us through the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The detailed evaluation of that will not be available until September-October. But at a high level there has been a very significant increase in the number of people who have received a service from the service system, including women and children fleeing violence. The real detail of that will not come for another couple of months.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Will that be publicly released?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Absolutely.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Can you give us a snapshot of what is available for men that are put out of their homes and where they go? What is the snapshot across New South Wales?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: First of all, can I say that the picture of who is homeless is often seen to be men because they are the ones we see on the streets more often than not but in fact the statistics show that women, children and young people make up a much larger proportion. Having said that, the services for men are extensive across the State. Will there ever be enough? Probably not. Taxpayers spent \$181 million last year and about \$188 million this year on homelessness services. Those services broadly across the State are addressing men's needs. Obviously, under my direction the Government has implemented some additional services. We are picking up a lot of men in that.

You may or may not be familiar with the fact that about a year ago now—I think it was just before Christmas last year—we started having pop-up housing offices. They are working really well. I think there was initial reluctance from the department to do it because they probably thought the Minister was being a bit whatever. But what happened was we found that we were doing more outreach to men. For example, the very first week we did Woolloomooloo down at Tom Uren Place. We picked 18 the first night and 30 over the week. Those services are working really well. We are trying to get a lot more services on the ground. Those are being generally accessed by men—some women, but mostly men.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Once the pop-up leaves what happens to these people?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What happens is we bring staff down to those pop-ups. You are welcome to come to one.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: No, it is fantastic. I asked a question on it last year. My question is that now we have seen them in practice what is the reality once the pop-up goes away?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The pop-up might come back. It has been back to Tom Uren Place. I have been with it to Wentworth Park, Tom Uren Place a couple of times and to Parramatta Park. There are a number of different locations. We did the same at Central station because a lot of people unfortunately sleep homeless there, mostly men. We have a thing called Link to Home so staff who would normally have been in their office come out and sit there. We have Housing staff there as well. People are able to be told where their application is up to and if they do not have an application we will help them. Also they try to give them temporary accommodation; what people on the streets actually know as TAs. They get three or five days and in that three or five days we try to get some wraparound services and try to work out exactly what their needs are. Hopefully we can then move them into more permanent accommodation where appropriate.

That does not always happen. Recently I stopped down in Martin Place and met a gentleman called Ben. It was maybe three or four weeks ago. Ben was a classic example. When I asked him was he homeless he said yes. I asked had he been in jail and he said yes. I then asked had he been in hospital and he said he had just come out of hospital. I asked him what for and he told me about something in his head where the Turkish President apparently had troops chasing him. I rang the wonderful Paul Ververs here and said, "Can you get someone down here?" I made Ben promise that he would stay there for a couple of hours. They sent somebody down that afternoon. They talked to him, they offered him temporary accommodation and all the services but in the end Ben, like so many of them, decided he did not want anything at this stage. It is really hard because most of these people have mental health issues as well. They come from drug dependency, alcohol dependency, mental health and domestic violence backgrounds. To try to wrap around those services is often challenging.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It is great what you are doing. It is obviously meeting needs at the point of call, which is a fantastic service, but I am more interested in men's refuges. I have a question about what you are doing about domestic violence, but more specifically I am asking about whether we can move the men out of home rather than the women and children. What are the statistics on that, because obviously it would be most helpful if we could remove the perpetrator from the home?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I see what you are saying. I agree with that issue. The focus has very much been on women and children as a result of domestic violence.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I have not got much time, with all due respect. I just want the statistics. How many men's refuges are there across New South Wales?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: How about I get those for you later in the details? Is that all right?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Yes. That will be fine. Secondly, you have allocated \$4.5 billion for domestic violence every year. How much have you allocated in this budget for caseworkers who are involved in protecting kids from domestic violence and will you commit to increasing the number of caseworkers in New South Wales so that kids are better off?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We are increasing the number of caseworkers. In the last year of the Labor Government I think there were about 1,980. At the moment it is sitting at about 2,000. There are about 60-odd more caseworkers already than there were in the last year of the Labor Government and if we need to do more of that we will. You would probably be aware that we have just had a review of how we deal with kids at risk and kids in care. There is a report led by David Tune, which is worth looking at. As a result, David Tune has indicated that we should be putting in more money, and we have. We have put in another \$190 million over the next four years to try to do early support services. I am happy to give you some detail on that in due course.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You said that you would increase caseworkers by an additional 60. Are they all within the community service centres? Are they all employed within Family and Community Services [FACS]?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: They are within FACS, yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I have one comment here in the submission that community service centres are being faced with arbitrary increases in targets. You would agree that an increase from 29 children per month to 110 children per month for a caseworker is unrealistic?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What I would agree with is, first of all, that caseworkers are some of the most wonderful people on earth. To do this job you have to be full of commitment and love for kids. You also have to have the resilience to be able to deal with some of the most difficult situations you will ever see in your life. When I go out and visit the community service centres—and there are 83 of them across the State—the stories they tell me about the challenging circumstances that the community does not hear about, and probably would not be interested in hearing about, are extraordinary. I can tell you that what these people see is sometimes horrible.

Having said that, those caseworkers have to have a professional approach in the sense of targets for some areas to lift the approaches that are required for accreditation purposes but also just to do what they need to do. The problem is that we need to make sure that more and more children are getting what are called face-to-face assessments. Again, under the former Government the process that was set up when similar situations were occurring under Bob Carr's regime was the helpline. At the time I opposed the helpline and I still have major concerns about the helpline. The helpline is a bit like what Dr Faruqi was talking about in terms of local conditions.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Point of order: Could you direct the Minister to be relevant to the question? The question was whether he would agree that an increase from 29 children per month to 110 is unrealistic for caseworkers.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am answering the question.

The CHAIR: The Minister cannot be directed to answer the question in a particular way but he needs to answer it in a relevant way. Minister, if you can answer the question that would be appreciated.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am trying to do that by giving the background. The helpline has seen a dramatic increase in cases that go to it. I do not have the figures in front of me but I will get those for you if you want them. I think it was something close to 200,000. It was 175,000 or something like that. A lot of cases are going to them and of that number maybe about 70,000 or 80,000 are considered at risk of significant harm. The important thing is for caseworkers to have some structure around what the expectations are to get out, visit and talk to some of these families and children when the reports come in. I do not know whether the number that you raise is accurate; it is a matter for the managers on the ground to make that decision. I respect the on-the-ground professional capacity of the managers who have a tough job; they make those decisions. Is the figure you have referred to correct? I do not know. You have not cited who it came from. You have not cited which CSC it is. I do not know, but I will say this: I will back the managers when they make those decisions and set those targets because we need to see more kids.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: So you do think it is realistic. This is another comment—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am sorry, I do what?

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: You do think it is realistic.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is not what I have said. I do not mind you asking me—

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: I asked you whether you agreed whether an increase from 29 children—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not mind you asking me whatever question you want to but you have to respect the fact that I, as Minister, am trying to answer your question. Do not put words in my mouth, please.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Well you do not answer questions. You have been asked a number of questions and you do not answer them.

The CHAIR: Order! Proceed with the questions.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: This is another comment by a caseworker, "Personally I find it frustrating when they suggest we see more children than before. Often it is just a single visit, we don't get to do any casework." So what you are setting as KPIs is increasing 29 children per month to 110 but the reality is that, even if they can get to see the children for a single visit, they do not get to do the casework. Is that not a concern for you?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I could sit here and read out anonymous messages too but you are not giving me any citations for what you are saying. I will answer as best as I can. There is no more important job in New South Wales, indeed in Australia, than the job of protecting children. Those who come to this task are people of commitment and application. In a sense I think everybody on this Committee, everybody in this Parliament and everybody in New South Wales would want our caseworkers to be doing what they can do with their most professional ability. FACS is trying to enliven their capacity through other tools—for example, at the moment FACS is using a program called KiDS. This is challenging because often there has to be multiple entries in it that actually get in the way of doing the sort of work you are talking about.

With KiDS, \$49 million is being spent this year to try to get a new ePlatform where those frontline workers will be able to work more effectively. So what we are trying to do is to make sure that some of the leftover legacies of not addressing some of these issues from your Government, the former Labor Government, are addressed through expenditure where we support the frontline workers. Those frontline workers—let me say, I have visited quite a few of the CSCs and they are all under pressure but they also know that the Government is working with them and supporting them in their endeavours. I have not heard the complaint that you are making now so I cannot comment specifically on that particular complaint.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: I can only assume that you are not reading the submissions that are being put forward by workers in the industry because it is certainly well documented.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am sorry, was that a question?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You are saying you do not know where this is coming from. I assume I am reading the same documents that you have access to. I fail to understand—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do you know how many workers there are in FACS?

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You are the Minister responsible for overseeing—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You do not.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: —this department. So far we have had you refer matters back to a royal commission because you did not want to deal with them and submissions that have been put forward by caseworkers you have not seen. I am actually wondering as the Minister what responsibility you wear? You cannot tell us what you have actually done in regard to the organisation where there are 24 allegations and not one action have you put forward that you have taken in regard to that case.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not think you have listened to anything I have said.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Rather than giving a history lesson about a government six years ago—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Your Government.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I would like to know—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Your government that created the problems because you did nothing about accreditation.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: What have you done as the Minister?

The CHAIR: Order! We will now move on to the next tranche of questions.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: How many workers have you got?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Approximately 2,000 frontline caseworkers across the 83 CSCs. I again say that they are doing a very good job in difficult circumstances. We have to do everything we can to back them, and that is what the Government is trying to do.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: You mentioned about the face-to-face assessments.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: How many are you not getting to?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Again, in the latter days of the last Government it was around about 21 per cent I think—sorry, 25 per cent.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Twenty-one per cent is correct.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Thank you, it was 21 per cent—the Secretary has just given me that information. In the March quarter of this year the FACS workers—this goes to the very issue that the Hon. Lynda Voltz was challenging me about—were seeing about 28 per cent. Sorry, 30 per cent in the March quarter but to June it was about 28 per cent.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Sorry, 38 per cent?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, in the March quarter 2016 the figures that came to me were that they had gone up to seeing around about 30 per cent.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Of how many?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Thirty per cent of all of the reports that are classified.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: But 30 per cent of what?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: It is the figure there. It will be about 24,000 children during the course of the year and that compares with about 12,700 children five years ago. In the last year there has been about a 20 per cent increase in the productivity of our frontline casework staff. They have done a phenomenal job in getting out of the office and seeing more children. I know that some people do feel some pressure from that but we try to support people. We think it is appropriate and we get very positive feedback from caseworkers. We have a very clear understanding of the support they will get from the organisation and what we together need to achieve, which is to see more of those kids.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That is probably in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse having highlighted the importance of empowering children and young people to speak up.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Basically you are advising the Committee on how the department has invested in services to ensure that those services move from a reporting culture to a responding culture to improve the safety and wellbeing of children?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Exactly.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: One of the greatest concerns that came to light in an inquiry held last week—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Was that the parliamentary inquiry looking into child protection?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Yes. There was some concerning feedback as to Aboriginal communities. Indeed, one commented that they were of the very strong view that people were responding to them in a very racist way—I think that is a fair way of putting it. That is a matter of deep concern for me. Would you like to comment on that sort of feedback?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The reality is that of the about 20,000 children in care at the moment approximately 6,000 are Aboriginal or identify as Aboriginal. That means that approximately one-third of all children in care are Aboriginal and yet the population identifying as Aboriginal is about 2½ per cent, and that is extraordinarily worrying. We need to do a lot more to support Aboriginal people in their family environment to avoid care. I held a forum—I am sorry if I did not invite you but I meant to.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: You did but it was a last-minute invitation so it clashed.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is all right. It was a really good forum.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I heard it was very helpful.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It was fantastic. We had about 300 or 350 Aboriginal people. I invited the Labor Party as well and the shadow Minister kindly attended. The message out of that was that Aboriginal people felt they were not being given due understanding of their cultural aspects. One of the people there made the point that a FACS worker who comes out who is not Aboriginal may think that because they see what non-Aboriginal people might consider to be a bit of a chaotic lifestyle, it does not mean they are not being well looked after. I thank all members on both sides of politics for coming to that forum and I thank all the Aboriginal people as well. It was amazing, we had all the aunties from the Northern Tablelands—Aunty Hazel and Aunty Jenny—all of them came. This was a big issue for them because they did not really trust government in a sense.

But the net result was I gave an undertaking, which I think is going to be incredible if it works—and I am hoping it works. We are doing a review of all Aboriginal children taken into care in the last 12 months. In fact, we are on the verge of announcing an independent overseer of that—an Aboriginal person, because as Aunty Hazel pointed out and the others pointed out to me that day, they will not have confidence in a review that might be carried out by the same people who made the decision.

Interestingly, Jenny Mikakos has done something similar in Victoria, a desktop thing, but they are already seeing results in terms of the new intake. So people are getting the message on the ground that, as caseworkers, perhaps they should be looking at things differently. I think a number of us—including in Queensland the Labor Minister up there, Shannon Fentiman—are all looking at this and it is a really positive thing to do. In fact, I am quite excited about what might happen.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, in response to an earlier question, you said that the number of women in refuges were roughly the same now as they were before—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: They were women's refuges?

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Yes. They were roughly the same as they were before.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think it is the same. I think it is 76.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Do you know the number before and after?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think it is 76, off the top of my head.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: It is 76 before and 76 after?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Sorry, I am just being told. I thought it was 76 and 76, but the Secretary has just shown me a figure here, which I had not seen. He is saying it is 81 afterwards. Perhaps he can explain that one, because I thought it was the same.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: So there has been more funding given to women in refuges. New ones have been set up, is that what you are saying?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes. The numbers we have are 76 before the reforms in 2014, of which 63 are in properties owned by the government and 13 in properties owned by non-government organisations. In 2016, there were 65 in properties owned by government and 16 in properties owned by non-government organisations.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: But they are all being funded by the Government?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes, they are all funded by government, and the operators in every case are non-government organisations.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, I have recently been contacted by someone who rang the domestic violence hotline in search of a place for herself and her daughter and they were directed, without their knowledge, to Personal Helpers and Mentors, which, as you would know, is a service that aims to provide increased opportunities for the recovery of people whose lives are severely affected by mental illness. I do realise that this is one case, but if you could clarify what happens when someone rings up looking for domestic violence and homelessness assistance. Who makes the decision to refer them on to a mental health provider? Is it the operator who talks to them on the phone? How does that happen and is the Government aware of these instances where people have been directed to the wrong place, and how do you deal with that?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You are saying in that case they were directed to the wrong place?

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Yes.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I obviously cannot comment on that, but there is generally a queue process where someone takes the call and then somebody else considers it, as I understand it. But I am not sure of the actual process. Deidre Mulkerin, who is a deputy secretary, may be able to answer that.

Ms MULKERIN: When people make contact with the domestic violence [DV] line we have caseworkers who answer those calls. They will spend some time going through what the immediate issues are, particularly focusing on safety planning because people making contact with the DV line are usually in need of immediate help. Part of that discussion will be about assistance with housing, support services, counselling services. I cannot comment about the particular case, but it is often, as you know, a complex mix of issues that mostly women make contact with the line about.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Of course, but I am just concerned that if women are falling through the cracks, is there a process to make sure that people are not directed to the wrong place, or how are these cases picked up? As you know, it is hard for women to make that decision to move and if they do not get the help they need then it could have a disastrous end.

Ms MULKERIN: I cannot comment whether or not it was an incorrect or correct referral.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think what Dr Faruqi is asking is what happens if they do get referred to the wrong place; how does that work then?

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Yes, absolutely.

Ms MULKERIN: The agency that the woman has been referred to would then have a discussion with her about the appropriate place to refer her on to.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It goes back to what I was saying about no wrong door. Theoretically, the agency to whom the woman was referred should actually take the full details and refer her back to wherever she should go. Having said that, I have to say I also have heard reports that some agencies do not do that as well as others. I am not sure that we will ever get to the point where when we are dealing with non-government organisations we will ever get it to work absolutely perfectly—but then the Government does not work that perfectly sometimes too.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister and officers. We will now move on to the next policy area for questioning, which is Social Housing. We will commence with the Hon. Lynda Voltz.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Minister, under Link2home, what procedures do you have in place to ensure that a parolee is not placed in housing in the same hotel as a woman or a child or a hotel utilised by FACS?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think what you are getting at is you are thinking that they should not go into a place where there are women escaping domestic violence. But a parolee may well be a woman and the woman may have been totally appropriate in that situation. Each case has to be analysed as it occurs. Having said that, I had a recent circumstance where the member for Newcastle, Tim Crakanthorp, raised with me—and I thank him for that—that there was a hotel, I think in Newcastle, called Silk, where he had been told that the department was placing people coming out of prison without really due assessment of them and there were women escaping domestic violence in the same situation. I shared his concerns totally and, as a result, I asked the department to reconsider how it was doing that.

In fact, I sent a letter a week or two ago to all members, all lower House members anyway—I apologise I did not send it to the upper House members; that might have been an oversight, I cannot remember—and asked everybody as local members who had some local knowledge to just help me with that because I thought the department, whilst they were making a good effort to do that, it is always helpful to have local, on-the-ground knowledge. I acknowledged, I think, in the letter that Tim Crakanthorp had actually brought it to my attention. So it is not perfect but hopefully they are picking up their game on it.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Do you have procedures in place at the moment to ensure that it is not happening?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will ask the deputy secretary who is responsible for the housing aspects to answer that question.

Mr VEVERS: Yes, we do. As a result of the review of temporary accommodation facilities, we now specify for each facility whether they are able to receive women escaping domestic violence and we check each of those facilities with both local and specialist homelessness services and the police and we now maintain a centralised list across the State of facilities which are appropriate for women and those which are only appropriate for men.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: So there is a clear breakdown on all of your facilities—a differentiation between facilities that men go to and the facilities that women go to. Is that what you are saying?

Mr VEVERS: There are some facilities where it is possible to have both go to, but I am talking specifically about facilities which are deemed to be suitable for women escaping domestic violence, and each of those facilities has been vetted by the police and by local specialist homelessness providers.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: But that does not preclude a parolee that has been placed may also be placed with women escaping domestic violence or women with children if it is a facility that you have assessed as suitable.

Mr VEVERS: It is not just a facility that we have assessed as suitable, it is a facility also that the police and specialist homelessness services have accepted as suitable and that it is a secure and peaceful environment for them.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: But they are assessing it in the context of, is this suitable in regards to one group? Are you asking them to assess across the board that it be suitable for women escaping domestic violence, women with children and women with parole release?

Mr VEVERS: The question that we asked the police and those homelessness services was whether the property was suitable for women escaping domestic violence.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Do all the facilities for women with children or women escaping domestic violence have ensuite bathroom facilities or do they use shared facilities?

Mr VEVERS: I cannot answer that; I would have to take that on notice.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We will try to find out, Ms Voltz, but I think the issue there is that what you have just heard is the result of your colleague, the member for Newcastle, raising the issue with me, for which we are all grateful because we understood that the processes were working well, but they were not apparently. But there are some challenging issues. When one gets out across the State one realises that in some of the regional areas there just are not the facilities, there is nothing. I was recently in Walgett in the north-western area and it is really challenging to find any place for people in these circumstances. There has to be a degree of pragmatism about it.

Mind you, I was also in Moree where they told me they had somebody coming into a facility there, escaping domestic violence, who was coming all the way from the northern beaches. She had chosen to do that because she wanted to get as far away as possible from all the mental hassles and the physical danger. Sometimes women travel out that way but people in the area often want to stay in the area and it is challenging to find a facility. I have directed the department to do everything humanly possible to make sure that we learn the lessons that were raised as a result of the Hunter example, where Mr Tim Crakanthorp was good enough to raise it with me and spoke to me about it. He was very decent about it.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: For example, in Wollongong there are two facilities that are listed for women. Of those two facilities, do both of them have ensuites or shared bathroom facilities?

Mr VEVERS: I would have to check. I do not know the facilities personally or that level of detail.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Last year there was a woman who had been knocked back at least 12 times by a refuge and was stabbed a dozen times. It was shortly after you had taken over the portfolio. You said that you would undertake a review into the refuges at that time. Could you, at this point now, tell us what the availability is for women approaching refuges at the moment and how often women are being turned away?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think you were out of the room when Dr Faruqi asked a similar question. I thought there were 56 women-only refuges before the Going Home Staying Home reforms and 76 after. But the Secretary kindly indicated that I was wrong and that it had increased to 81. So we have increased the number of refuges. There will still be, from time to time, people who are turned , but that should not happen; they should be making every effort. Because it is run by non-government organisations, there is a policy of "no wrong door". They should be supporting them, but from time to time I fear that there will be those situations. But what the numbers are at the moment, I will ask the Secretary to address that.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Ms Voltz, as part of this process of reform we have established a monitoring and evaluation plan which is independent of the agency and is chaired by a well-known academic, Professor Eileen Baldry. They are soon to report on the effect of the reforms and one of the things we would be looking to is whether the service system is still unable to give the right service to everybody who needs it and obviously with a high priority on women fleeing violence, particularly women with children. The data will begin to emerge and that will enable us to see if we can, within our resources, continue to reshape the system to provide the best possible response to women.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: You had refuges such as the one in Taree that had previously been a 24-hour refuge but I understand now there is only someone there nine to five and there is an answering machine. Will that be included in your review?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The Government, through the Minister, recently increased funding by, from memory, \$10 million a year to expand the 24-hour, seven-days-a-week response. So I am not familiar with the example in Taree. But it is fair to say that before 2014 there were a great number of refuges that did not operate on a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week basis. That has been the case for some time. And, as a result of the reforms, there are now more resources in the system and we are beginning to get much better information about where the system works and where it does not work so well.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Of the 81 refuges you say exist now, how many of those are staffed 24 hours a day?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I would have to respond on notice.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Can I just say that the money that the Secretary just referred to only came down in this year's budget. When the issue was raised, as the Secretary says, there have always been refuges under both governments that chose, for their own reasons, not to operate 24 hours. I think that it is an issue. It depends upon the structure of the refuge but I personally think it is a big issue. I approached Treasury and Treasury granted a further \$10 million a year—I think it is \$20 million over the next two years—to try to address some of those issues. Whatever is happening now hopefully will change in a little while.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Some of those specialist women's services have now been lost, haven't they?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Well, I know that has been put to us but we are saying no. As I said to Dr Faruqi before, I think the issue was that people have been providing services for a long while—the women's collective movement of the 19 and 1960s did an amazing job setting up women's refuges and a lot of them operated that way for many years. So it was the right time to look at seeing if we could get them working better. Unfortunately, the way it was done on the ground often meant that there was one service in a contestability effort with another service and that meant there was some bad blood that came forth. And some people have

obviously stayed committed to the old style, the old methodology. I think that is understandable but also they have to operate in a more efficient way in the sense of dollars—but not in the way they were dealing with women, because they were working really well with women.

But perhaps the taxpayers' money was not being used in quite the right way. There was a review and I think that where we are now, as the Secretary said, we have five more refuges than before. But the challenge remains to get the services operating as best they can. That will be ongoing. Having said that, Ms Barbara Kilpatrick, OAM, was the woman who advised government for probably more than 30 years on this area. Sadly, she passed away a couple of years ago. She taught me a lot about the women's refuge movement and I respect greatly what the women's collective movement did, but that does not mean we should not move forward and try in the twenty-first century to get some economies and efficiencies around how it works.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: It is not the number of refuges, it is the type of refuge. There is no point having a new refuge in Kempsey if it has no links into the local Aboriginal community. That would be correct?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I agree with that.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: So when the funding restructure happened, all the specialist workers who had worked long and hard with the Aboriginal community were not re-employed.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am sympathetic to what you are saying. I think there was a period where there was uncertainty and some of the really experienced workers who had been in that environment in the women's collective movement for a long while felt that they were not valued and they left. That made it hard, in some areas. I do not know the exact example you are talking about. The Secretary says that he does, so he can answer it. I am sympathetic to your position but the Secretary might want to embellish it.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I do not want to get into an arid argument about it but the Kempsey refuge attracted a lot of controversy locally and there were views put that the new operator was a poor operator. Having been there on two occasions, I am absolutely convinced that the new operator is an excellent operator and that that is a service that is providing a good service for the community and specifically a good service for Aboriginal women and children in that community.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: You have lost the specialist workers from the local community?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: That implies that the workers who have taken up roles are not able themselves, and that is not a fair judgement on the people that have come in. I think they are very good.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: The Taree refuge was handed over to new operators and in Forster they had to raise their own money to set up a new refuge following that decision.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: That was a decision made. The design of the service system we now have has two major inputs: first, the body of evidence about what actually worked to prevent homelessness, to prevent repeat homelessness, to well support people who come into the crisis system; secondly, the other significant input was locally led processes with communities and operators to try to design a local response that made sense on the mid North Coast, or one that made sense in western New South Wales or Western Sydney. The services do look a little different place by place, but that reflects the nature of local demand and the views and experience of a range of people in the local community. Not everybody was or is happy with the changes that were made. I acknowledge that. We think that, by and large, it is a set of reforms that is beginning to show real improvements and, as the Minister described, with additional funding arriving in the current budget, it will get better again.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: The new refuges that are opening, are they refuges that raised local funding to fill what they perceive as gaps from previous refuges?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The refuges I am describing are government funded.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Government funded but locally initiated following the changes that occurred?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I would need to check that, Ms Voltz.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We made some funding announcements recently. A group out of Manly are looking to do more in terms of philanthropic funding with seed money of half a million dollars, from memory, in taxpayers' money. They are looking to increase the number of refuges. There will always be a need for more services because, sadly, domestic violence—reflecting the last 20 years of drug and alcohol issues—is getting worse. There will always be a demand for more services. I must say I was pleased that the Government agreed

to support that philanthropic view. At the moment the taxpayers are funding 81 refugees, whereas a couple of years ago it was 76.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: How many beds are in the 81 refugees?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That question arose recently. There was a complaint about the fact that under the current recording system of Family and Community Services the number of beds had never been recorded. When it was raised publicly I asked the same question and I was advised that the beds do not necessarily mean that much. It might be three or four beds in a room that can only take one lady who is escaping domestic violence. Nevertheless, I asked the department to make a call, even though our database did not facilitate that, to all the refugees and find out how many total beds were available. It was substantial.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The result of that is 523 bedrooms, 1,430 beds and some of those beds will be bunk beds for kids. There is a capacity to accommodate up to 1,900 women and children on any given day and night.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Did you have the breakdown of how many single rooms and how many family rooms?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: That would be in the data.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will ask Maree Walk whether she knows that. If not, Ms Voltz, I share your interest in that and I will ask for the information.

Ms WALK: I will take that on notice. Some rooms are able to be both single and family, particularly women who have little babies as well. I will take that on notice.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: The difference between 1,430 and 1,900, are those cases where there is a double bed?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Bunk beds, as the Secretary just said.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: With a bunk bed each bed would be counted as a single. You would not have one bunk bed and count it as one bed; you would count that as two beds, would you not?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You would.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: You have 1,430 and you can accommodate 1,900 people. That assumes there are 500 that are doubling up in a bed with mum, I assume?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I agree with you, Ms Voltz. When I saw those figures I had the same query and I had forgotten to ask that question. I am glad you raised it. I will be fascinated to know the answer. We will find out.

Ms WALK: We will take that on notice. Some refugees have trundle beds, some have more cots than others, based on previous demand.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Cots would be counted as a bed?

Ms WALK: Let me take that on notice.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Because we asked the question, and it is not data that is normally gathered, I think the refugees might have had different ways of counting their beds. Let us look at it and I will happy let you know.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Do you think the blocking of the sale of Ausgrid will have an impact on the commitment of \$1.1 billion to the Social and Affordable Housing Fund?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The amount of money being contributed by the New South Wales Government on behalf of taxpayers to the range of issues, that is out-of-home care and housing, is not varying as a result of anything to do with Ausgrid—and any other questions you have on that front you can direct to the Treasurer or the Premier.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: You will be committed to the \$1.1 billion?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: As I said, direct any questions beyond our budget to the Treasurer or the Premier.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Mr Coutts-Trotter, you recited stats about the women's refugees. Do you have any information about men's refugees and how many beds are available?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We can get you the number of facilities and the contracts with the operators that specify the number of men that they need to provide a service for. Do we have a bedroom count? I do not think we do.

Ms WALK: I do not think so either. Some of the men would be captured in the young people because those refuges do 15 to 25 years old. That is another area that we can overlay.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It is alarming that you are distinct on the women providers and how many beds and what is available but do not know with men's services.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Can I say I agree with you, Mr Green.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: You can take it on notice. I have lots of question.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I agree with you. The issue around women and domestic violence has been at the forefront in the last few years and there has been a lot of work done in that regard. I agree we need to find the same statistics and I will get them for you, one way or another.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am not trying to take anything away from women's services.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You are putting a balanced perspective and saying there needs to be more focus on men.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: If we are going to change the mindset and paradigm of domestic violence and put men into refuges and leave women with the children at home we need to change mindsets and get a clear stocktake of what is available in New South Wales.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think you will agree with me, Mr Green, that for years there has been a challenge because the force, the strength, has been—and properly in that sense—with women's domestic violence in refuges. I raised with my local refuge and Barbara Kilpatrick, going back 20 years ago, the fact that the services were not available for the perpetrators. Having said that there are some services. I visited a good one in Lismore recently, but there are nowhere near enough services and that is an historic fact. We need to do more on that front.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That brings me to the third category that arose in the *Daily Telegraph* recently: domestic violence in same-sex relationships. I am wondering what the department is doing in the way of that, because there will be a need for those victims to find a safe place to work out their lives.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The fact that it is a same-sex relationship does not prejudice females to get into a women's refuge. They are escaping domestic violence and there is no difference. Again, for men, the same services are there.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Can you update the Committee with regard to the current public housing situation at Millers Point and how the Government has responded to the needs of those vulnerable housing tenants, ensuring they are adequately housed and not displaced from ageing in place?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is a challenge. It is a difficult issue. The Government took a view which was that those particular properties were worth so much—as you are aware, when I became Minister I had a chat to the Premier and others about this issue. Initially the view was that each one of those properties could sell for between \$1.5 million or \$2 million, and possibly \$5 million or \$6 million.

The \$2 million sale of one very old property—usually more than 100 years old, with challenging maintenance issues, and often with an elderly individual living in it—could lead to the rehousing of six families or individuals from the waiting list of 60,000. As much as that was a difficult decision for the Government, the fact was that the sale could raise half a billion dollars and build about 1,500 new homes. That was the policy decision that was taken to try to address the very long public housing waiting list. The last figures I saw showed that the list had gone up by another 2,000 or 3,000. Even though we are building new homes at a rate that has not been seen for years, it is still very challenging. I do not know whether you have seen the really good Auditor-General's report from three or four years ago. I was fascinated to read it because he talked about the fact that the former Government had been forced—as governments sometimes are—to make the decision to reduce the amount of public housing because it had to pay maintenance on the properties. In a sense, it was eating public housing.

We have reversed that. We have created a lot more. I am intent on building a lot more public housing. As recently as last week a Labor Minister from one of the other States came to see what we were doing and to consider how it could work for them. It is difficult. Having said that, I also recognise that there are some folks who have a community of interest. Some people really want to stay in Millers Point. As a result, I approached

the Government and the Cabinet and it was agreed that we would put aside 28 units for accommodation. They have all been modernised. They are only small but they are fantastic. Sadly, not all those properties have been taken up. At the moment only about 12 of them have been taken up.

I have asked the department to be as flexible as possible. For example, there are a couple of brothers who are used to living together. In those 28 units there is one three-bedroom, a couple of two-bedrooms and the rest are one-bedroom. That is the evolving accommodation demographic: Most people are living by themselves. It does not mean that they necessarily want just one bedroom for accommodation, unfortunately, but that is what the Auditor-General said that we should be doing. In the case of the two brothers, I asked the department to knock a hole in the wall. That required council approval. The department got council approval and put the two brothers together. We are trying to be flexible.

The Committee would also know that Minister Speakman also recently made a decision about the Sirius building. There are about seven tenants still in there. We are looking to rehouse them. I have been out personally to look at some of the properties. Almost everybody who is being rehoused has been offered really good property in Glebe, Marrickville and Leichardt—inner-city areas. There are a few people who are saying that they will not move. A few of the younger ones are running a campaign saying that they will not move. I am saying, "I am sorry; you have to move." For those people who have complex needs, there are another 16 units of accommodation available in Millers Point.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Do you know the condition of sale of the Sirius building? Why could affordable and public housing not be included in that?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There has been no decision taken on that yet. There are two arguments. On the one hand, you could say that on all government-held land there should be some affordable and social housing. Sometimes that happens. On the other hand, by saying that that has to happen to the Sirius building you could substantially reduce the price. You could get a much higher price and build a lot more social and affordable housing somewhere not too far away. I think the answer is that one should probably go with the latter. It is difficult.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Providing accommodation on site ties in with the principle of ageing in place. That is pretty important for those people.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I understand that. Keep in mind that some people in the Sirius building have been there for only two or three years but are saying they want to stay there.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am talking about the one who has been there for 50 years.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There are others for whom I feel the greatest sympathy, but the reality is that I also feel sympathy for the other 60,000 individuals and families on the waiting list.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I appreciate that. In 2015-16 what has been the total sale of public housing? What amount is being used to reinvest in developing new social housing?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Every cent that comes out of the social housing in Millers Point goes straight into—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am asking about sales of public housing across New South Wales.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will have to take that on notice. I am trying to change the policy, because sometimes the department has sold a block of land that was next door to other land where it could have developed new social housing. I have asked the department to look at that. I will come back to you with numbers.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That innovation has been used in my area. I turn to men's refuges in regional areas. Minister, I wrote to you recently about the Hope Centre again, with the idea of including a men's refuge. Do you have any comment about what the Government is doing in regional areas? As you know, most of the non-government organisations do not have good processes or understanding. They just want to help. What is the Government doing to assist the establishment of men's refuges in rural areas?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is a challenge. Minister Andrew Constance came to see me about the Hope Centre as recently as last week. Both of you are concerned about that. That centre is not funded by the Government at the moment.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That is right.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have asked the FACS officer responsible for that area to come up from the South Coast to talk to me about it. I am looking at what we can do about that. At this point I cannot give any guarantees. I am working through those issues.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Those people will become homeless without a refuge.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There are six to eight beds in that facility.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Yes.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will work my way through that and provide an answer.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Thank you.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Minister, as you know, Cumberland Hospital is slated for closure. Have you had discussions with the department about rehousing people from that facility? There are about 100 patients on the Cumberland Hospital site who need to be rehoused.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have not. That has not crossed my desk at this point. I will ask whether any of my deputy secretaries at the table knows anything about it. If someone with a mental health issue comes out of an institution and has a housing need it creates a set of challenges. The desire to close some of these institutions has been around for 20 years. They will go on to the housing waiting list and, hopefully, be prioritised. The Secretary may know something about that.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I need to take that on notice because my deputy secretary colleague who is working most closely with Health is not before the Committee today.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Who is that?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Chris Leach has been working with Health. I can find out for the Committee. Health have the lead on that.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: What is the waiting time for the priority list at the moment?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It depends on where it is.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: I am talking about Western Sydney.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It varies. I will not give specific examples because that might create expectations.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: I understand that some people are more urgent than others.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The history of the priority waiting list is a problem. I am not being political, but there was a recognition by your Government that the general housing waiting list was not well managed. I am talking about governments of both political persuasions, not just your Government. The Government recognised in the late 1990s that there was an issue in trying to prioritise people's needs, so it established a priority waiting list. The sad truth is that in some areas the priority waiting list becomes the real list, because people on the general list can wait as long as 14 years in some areas. I will not name an area because that tends to colour people's views, but there are some parts of Western Sydney where, if you are in urgent need, you can get a house very quickly. In other areas you might be waiting a few months or even a few years.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: On the closure of Cumberland Hospital, Health will tell you which are the greatest priorities for rehousing and then you work with them. Is that the way it works?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is the way it works.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Thanks very much.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: The housing report that was put together some time ago talked about moving government housing to community housing providers. Can you provide the Committee with an updated percentage on that? Is it increasing?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That came out of a COAG agreement in 2008. Obviously I think it was mostly Labor governments, but it was a good thing. It has arguments, like everything, in this policy area. The thinking was that if you were to move people who are currently in government housing across to non-government organisations, being the community housing sector, the community housing sector might do better wraparound services and might do better looking after the whole person holistically. I think we are up to about 21 per cent at the moment, is it not?

Mr VEVERS: Yes.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The target for that was 35 per cent. It is proceeding.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: By what year—35 per cent by 2030 or 2025 or 2020?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Did they put a target on it back in 2008? I think it was 20 years. We are up to about 21 per cent. It is progressing to the 35 per cent. I put out that policy. The Auditor-General identified back a few years ago there was not a strategic approach to this in New South Wales. I got the department to work very hard on this and it produced a Future Directions policy, which was put out maybe about eight months ago. That sets out some very clear agendas on more social housing, better social housing and better experiences for those in social housing. It is on track.

Is it the science? I do not think it is. I think that community housing providers do a great job. We have various ones—there is about one dozen in tier one, tier two, tier three, that all have different levels of expertise. Some of them do amazing jobs, some of them could do a bit of work to get better. But having them manage properties is generally good. Some of the housing officers do an amazing job because a lot of housing officers have changed their view that used to exist, again for many years, and that we are not just here to put a roof over people's heads, we are here to support them and get wraparound services. It is progressing. In relation to Future Directions also, I made an announcement that there will be a leasing structure. The Auditor-General highlighted the fact that—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That is my next question.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I was reading the report of the Auditor-General a couple of weeks ago—I had nothing better to do that particular weekend—and there was an interesting highlight in it that he felt that we should be giving them longer leases so they could leverage.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That is correct.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I was hoping that by giving them longer leases we could get them to leverage and build more properties. But I think optimistically I would be pushing it now because all of the fiscal advice is that at the very best they will be able to leverage to get better maintenance for their properties, better services for the people who are there. But the advice is it is probably—I hope I am wrong—unrealistic to expect them to build a whole lot more housing. Having said that, there are some, particularly the tier ones, who have done some amazing work and have actually built some more housing. They also had the advantage that for a while there was probably the Federal government funding that came through for Nation Building. They have built a whole lot of additional houses. They own those ones, and they have title to those.

So that might actually facilitate some leveraging. I am not convinced on us actually getting rid of the public housing estate but we are looking at all options at the moment. I mean getting rid of the public housing estate if, for example, we were to assign them to properties to tier one, and they did not do actually do the job, how do we deal with that? There are some real issues around that but I am looking at all options. Anything we can do to build more social housing is the highest priority for this Government, which is the first government in probably 20 years that has actually done that.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Since you are open to everything, what about the shared equity idea of using public land or Crown land, certainly in regional and rural areas, where young couples who cannot get into the market can actually have shared equity with the government?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Technically at the moment it is possible but it is not actually done.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Are you open to that?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am totally open to it. Let me say, one of the areas that I have looked at with the department just recently—I just came back from a trip up around the north-west and in east Moree where they have a huge problem. There are some young kids there who think it is okay to burn down houses. I am looking at how we might in that community, which is mostly Aboriginal in that particular part of town, be able to facilitate them getting equity or shared equity and hopefully then to send a message to the young people that this is an asset owned by your community, rather than owned by some obscure taxpayer somewhere else. I am looking at that at the moment but also I am very open to the concept of shared equity in other properties. It does not happen very often. Western Australia has got a bit happening but not a lot, but we are looking at that at the moment. Any good ideas you have, please come forward with them.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That is one. The second one relates to growth management strategies put together by local government quite a few years ago under Labor. Those growth management strategies never really incorporated the idea of affordable housing.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What do you mean by growth?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Basically the Labor Government made local government go over and have a bird's eye view of what they have in their area and what would be potential growth sites. They should identify those and take them to the community and have a debate.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do you mean owned by the department?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: No, owned by the people—release areas.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Sounds more like a planning issue.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It was a planning issue. In relation to affordable housing, the Government could come in on that note to basically make social public affordable housing and give some incentives to those growth management opportunities.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am not sure. Maybe we should take this question offline and have a discussion about it. But can I say that I have indicated to the planning Minister that I would like to see us develop an affordable housing strategy, particularly on government land.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: In relation to the massive backlog of public housing property maintenance in the hundreds of millions—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We have just renewed the contracts.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Where is it up to?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There was a problem, and actually to be honest, I think there are still some problems. The new contracts across the various districts have got, I think, it is about eight companies, is it?

Ms SKEWES: Five.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Five companies and they have changed the way—again I will talk to you offline and give you the detail. I do not think it is working as well as I had hoped, but it is still working. Having said that, one thing I did do just before the contracts were signed, I insisted on a new clause in them—and I will happily say this publicly, and I hope the companies take notice because I am serious about this—which says that if they do not do the right thing the Minister can terminate their contract. That has never been in those contracts before. They are all on notice that they either perform for our tenants or they are out. You know how there is a trip adviser and you can go on a trip and then say whether the people who did the trip for you were good or the hotel was good, I have asked the department to do a similar thing for the tenants. So I will have a public statement. It is going to be really good—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: That is going to be great.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Are they covered by parliamentary privilege?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Probably not. I am looking at every option.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Will you use that for all government services, including education maintenance?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: At this stage it is only my idea for our housing but it may get picked up. On the other hand, I may get taken out.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Minister, does your department administer the Community Building Partnership scheme?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Are you concerned that 1,300 grants have been given out that have not been receipted properly?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: To be honest, Ms Voltz, I am not sure what you are talking about.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: A report in the *Daily Telegraph* today states that groups have failed to provide proper receipts—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I did not read all the *Daily Telegraph* today, only a couple of pages.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: More than 1,300 grants under the Premier's Community Building Partnership Scheme.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Obviously it would be nice to think that all of that is being used but I will leave that to the Premier and the Treasurer to sort out, if you do not mind.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: The Premier stated that he was undertaking a review of some of the grants that have been given, which I assume your department undertook on his behalf.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I honestly do not know. It has only been in the *Daily Telegraph* today and I have not read it. I will ask whether a deputy secretary knows anything about it.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I will ask Ms Walk to comment, as it is in her area. I might just remind you though that the policy is set by another agency, in this case Premier and Cabinet.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: But you administer the grants?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We administer the grants, that is right.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: That is what I am asking about.

Ms WALK: The question is around following a report that we administer the grants. But I do think that the policy questions are around the way forward, around those agencies that receive funding and the need to equip them and other agencies. Often for these tranches, agencies apply for a particular amount, say \$20,000 for a bus for their local agency. They might not receive the full amount; some might receive \$10,000 for example, and they might take some time to be able to raise the other funds for the whole agency. There is an issue around them being a lot less timely than any other grants that we might equip, but the overall monitoring of that is done between ourselves and Premier and Cabinet. Premier and Cabinet will be ready to talk to this.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Maybe you could explain to me how your department missed that La'u Samoa had applied for the same grant in five different electorates.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Sorry, can you say that again? What was it?

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: How did your department miss that the La'u Samoa organisation had made the same grant application in five separate electorates?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am not defending it because I do not know enough about your particular question and I am not going to address the particular issue because I am not sure, but can I say that I think the figure that each local electorate gets is either \$200,000 or \$300,000 under that particular scheme and it works really well. I think you will find that local members think it is fantastic because their communities get a catalyst to do some amazing things. The best community organisations often get the money. Having said that, I am aware that if it is \$200,000 there might be 10 organisations all applying for something. Some of them might only apply for \$1,000, but say they were applying for \$20,000 each then an organisation that has the wherewithal knows the chances of them getting \$20,000 out of a particular area.

If their particular service covers multiple areas they can apply in multiple electorates. That is not anything other than them making an effort to try to get some money out of each electorate that they cover. I am sure most of the services that I have seen have been doing really good work across multiple electorates. I do not know it necessarily means whatever you are thinking it might mean. I will have a look at it but I really do not think it is as bad as what you are thinking.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: I have the grant applications here. They made five applications for equipment that would cost \$22,000 and were given a grant of \$56,000. How did your department miss—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Which electorates was it?

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: There was East Hills, Bankstown, Campbelltown. It is an organisation called La'u Samoa and the Premier has asked your department to do a review of their grant process. How did your department miss that they had made applications in all of those electorates and were approved funding in separate electorates?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You do not do the assessments, do you, Ms Walk?

Ms WALK: The assessment is done locally by the local member. Let us take those on notice.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, that is not right. I am sorry. The local member has a say but it is done by some sort of body that is exterior to us.

Ms WALK: There is a local panel headed by the local member.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: But you administer the grants and check that they are correct?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not think I can answer it. I think the departmental officials have indicated they are not sure and it crosses over with another agency. I think it is fair enough.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Then answer this question: When the Premier said that he was doing a review did you undertake that review for him?

Ms WALK: No, the review was done externally. We have literally just received the report in the last couple of weeks.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Where was it externally undertaken and how did they access your documents?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have not seen the story in the paper, I do not know about it but I would say the appropriate person to deal with it is either the Treasurer or in Premier and Cabinet.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: These grants have been subject to questions without notice in the House. They have been the subject of newspaper stories over months and months. Eight months after these grants were raised I do not think it is unreasonable to ask what the department has done in regard to these applications.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think you need to direct your questions on that issue to the primary reviewing body, which is either the Treasurer or, I think, Premier and Cabinet and so the Premier.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: But are you not charged with administering the scheme and checking the paperwork?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am sorry. I have given you my answer.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: You are saying the Premier's office is charged with administering the scheme?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Not the Premier's office, Premier and Cabinet. I think you need to talk to the Premier because he is the Minister for Premier and Cabinet.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Then why does Family and Community Services have the grants approval process on its website?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Because that is what we have been asked to do but the process is administered, as I understand it, through Premier and Cabinet.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: The grant applications are administered through Premier and Cabinet and they pay the amounts but you guys put the grants up?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Pardon?

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Who actually administers the grants? Who gets the applications and makes a list before they go out to the independent panel and then come back and get paid some money?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: If you ask any of your local colleagues they will tell you, because I have done it over the years, that you speak to someone from an office that is in the Department of Premier and Cabinet. That is where you should be asking your questions. I do not think there is a similar scheme in the upper House, is there?

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: No, but why would FACS be administering a scheme that Premier and Cabinet is the decision-maker on? When you have no role in an approval of the grants budget—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There are wonderful and mystical things that I still am amazed by in government where one agency is doing all sorts of things and the other one might be told just to give the money out because of whatever. I am just saying in this case regarding the questions you are asking I would like to know the answers but the answers are to come from Premier and Cabinet, not from my public servants.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Who does the reconciliation of the grants?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Premier and Cabinet.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: They are the people who the receipts and the acquittals come back to?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think it is Premier and Cabinet but I will ask the Deputy Secretary because she is thrusting herself forward to the microphone.

Ms WALK: We manage the administrative processes on behalf of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The report that you are referring to has only just been received and is being discussed by the agency

who oversights the grants and we do the administrative work. Some of the questions you have asked I am happy to take on notice because some of the issues about who has and has not had their acquittals done has been in response to that report. Can I say literally we just met on Thursday, so the discussion between our department in terms of the administrative work we do to support the overarching grants is just literally starting to be worked through.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Can I say I have had nothing to do with it so I really do not know.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Administratively, when you go to the website and fill in the criteria for what you are applying for and upload your documents, that would be held by your department.

Ms WALK: We use a particular grants mechanism, so we gather them together and do the accreditation and things like that—not accreditation, we do the administrative work to enable the agencies who are the grantees, if you like, to be able to make their decisions. We do the administrative work.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: How about I find out. I will get a written answer for you.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: You do the administrative work.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am not sure that is right.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: You would have a list of who has applied and you would provide that to the local members and the local committee that makes the decision. Is that correct?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: This is a function that was moved into the agency in the last machinery of government change. Depending on when in history you are talking about it may actually not have sat inside the agency.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: The 2015 round is the one I am talking about so that would have sat in your agency.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I would need to check that for you, to be honest.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: That went up on your website.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not think anybody really knows the answer on that one. Let us find out for you.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: When you are finding out the answer can you come back to me with how your department missed that La'u Samoa had made five separate applications for the one item and what action you took about that?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will take it. I accept that you are concerned about something and apparently it has been mentioned in the media so let me find out. I will get a report for the department and let you know.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Is it possible that the report that has been handed to you could be tabled or provided on notice?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am not going to answer that one until I know more about it.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Could you also look into why some organisations are applying for grants for properties they do not own? There are incorporated charity organisations that own properties but other organisations are applying for grants.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Just so I can try to get the department to produce the information you need can you explain that again? I did not quite follow that.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: A number of grants have been put forward—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Grants or applications?

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: A number of applications for grants have been put forward by a community group for a number of different sites that they do not own. One is a school and one is a community hall in another area. They are in two separate electorates. They have put forward the grants for them and they have been approved.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not think that you have to own a site. For example, in my local area a football club that does not own a site, it is a council site, wanted to do—

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: But they need the permission of the owners?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Maybe. For example, a grant might come that says it is subject to getting approval. We will find out for you.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: The school said they knew nothing about the grant application.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not know what you are talking about there but let me find out the general rule for you.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Can you give an indication to the Committee of how the department is going as to the reforms in meeting the needs of people with disability in social housing?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Can I say, first of all, the change to the NDIS, which is now well and truly coming upon us, is fantastic. To have a person-centred approach is going to, hopefully, produce amazing outcomes for those individuals; it will empower them. The challenge is that, as I understand it, the Federal Government is still to work through—this is not my area of expertise by the way, this is really the Hon. John Ajaka's—the issue of the cost of capital and the contribution from the Federal Government as to how they will fund that cost of capital. Now I understand that means: What money will be contributed to building and providing new accommodation for those people who might require it? Obviously some of those people will be coming into our normal public housing system but others might require special accommodation. I would imagine a lot of the accommodation will need to be purpose built. So let me ask beyond that from any of my secretaries seated at the table—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I can see you are itching to respond.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Not really.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: How do you tell when his is itching to answer questions?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Because he gets rather like me.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I normally notice when he is itching not to answer a question.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: It is as close to an itch as a bureaucrat gets. It is important to draw the distinction between people who need specialist accommodation that combines a place to live with a set of services and those who would have services that can be delivered to them wherever they live. What we have seen in the Hunter is that there has been a small increase in the proportion of people getting access to social housing who are members of the NDIS.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Explain why it is the Hunter though.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The three local government areas in the Hunter was the trial site in New South Wales. It is an early indication but it looks as if the kind of supports you get through the NDIS might make it a little bit more likely that you are able to get access to social housing, and by that I mean that one of the tests is whether someone is likely to be able to sustain the tenancy. If you have got inner-home supports of various kinds available to you through the NDIS that might mean you are able to sustain a social housing tenancy but without those supports you could not.

That is the early data. I guess the bigger picture is more people exercising choice and control, and that will include housing. There is a view that that will lead to demand from people who are currently living with their families to live independently, potentially in social housing. That will add to the general demand for social housing. So the first and best response is to provide more social housing and then we prioritise places within social housing based on relative assessment of need. So if you are someone with a disability and a range of other needs and you can sustain a tenancy then you would be prioritised.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: We know that the Government is looking at new surcharges for foreign investors—about \$1 billion over the next four years. What proportion will you be getting for social and affordable housing?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No idea.

The CHAIR: That brings to a conclusion the 2016-17 budget estimate hearings for the portfolio of Family and Community Services, Social Housing.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I appreciate that everybody was extremely courteous in asking their questions and, yes, pushing particular issues but that is the nature of the job. Thank you to all members of the Committee for your efforts this morning.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, for attending. I also thank your officers for the work they do on behalf of the people of this State.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.