

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 1

Friday 16 September 2005

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

THE LEGISLATURE

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

Reverend the Hon. Dr G. K. M. Moyes (Chair)

The Hon. K. F. Griffin
The Hon. D. T. Harwin

The Hon. C. M. Robertson
The Hon. I. W. West

PRESENT

The Hon. Dr Meredith Burgmann, *President of the Legislative Council of New South Wales*

Mr J. Evans, *Clerk of the Parliaments*

Mr G. McGill, *Financial Controller*

Mr W. Cahill, *Clerk Assistant*

Mr D. Blunt, *Clerk Assistant*

Mr A. Shariat, *Manager, Information Technology Services*

Mr M. Andrews, *Manager, Security Services*

Ms Y. Andrews, *Chief of Staff*

CHAIR: I welcome you to this public hearing of General Purpose Standing Committee No.1. I thank the President, the Hon. Meredith Burgmann, MLC, and departmental officers for attending today. At this meeting the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Legislature. Before questions commence there are some procedural matters that must be dealt with. I point out that, in accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, which are available at the door, members of the Committee and witnesses may be filmed or recorded, but people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs.

In reporting proceedings of this Committee you must take responsibility for what you publish or what interpretation you place on anything said before the Committee. There is no provision for members to refer directly to their own staff while at the table. Members and their staff are advised that any messages should be delivered through the attendant on duty or through any of the clerks. I declare the proposed expenditure open for examination. Madam President, do you wish to make a brief opening statement?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, thank you. In previous years the Financial Controller of the Parliament, Mr McGill, appeared before this Committee following the issue of a summons. I will not take up the time of the Committee going into the history of this matter—we have to go back 500 years. Suffice it to say that it related to the independence and mutual respect of the two Houses. Following discussions between the two Clerks, the Speaker agreed to dispense with the requirement to issue him a summons and this year Mr McGill appears by invitation, which is the same arrangement for the appearance of Ministers from the other place before these committees.

This arrangement does not impact on the traditional independence of the two Houses and their committees. I remind members that Mr McGill is here to provide information in relation to the budget estimates relevant to the Legislative Council and the joint departments, and not the Legislative Assembly. As is usual in such meetings I will ask officers, including Mr McGill, to respond to certain questions or aspects of questions that are relevant to their respective responsibilities. I would also request that when members are asking questions specific to the budget papers to provide me with the page number so that I can follow it properly in the budget papers.

I have another request, which I have made in the past few years, and that is if you have questions about security that are in any detail, please do not ask them here. I am very happy to have a meeting with you in my office with the head of security to talk to you about them. I think it is better if detailed questions are not asked here. Thank you.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Will you explain your understanding of why no resolution was put to the House reconvening the Library Committee in the Fifty-Third Parliament?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, there is an explanation for that. I will give you the details about resolutions to do with committees. The old Standing Order No. 280 required the appointment of four sessional committees—the Standing Orders Committee, the Library Committee, the Printing Committee and the House Committee. New Standing Order No. 204 allows for the appointment of sessional committees but does not mandate that certain sessional committees must be appointed. Under new Standing Order No. 204 there is nothing to prevent the appointment of a sessional committee to address an issue should the need arise. However, since the adoption of the new standing orders in May 2004, there has been no move to establish any sessional committee. Basically, that is because it is up to the Leader of the Government to make that move and that has not happened. In terms of what I am in charge of all can answer for, I have given you a formal situation. You would really need to ask the Leader of the Government why a move has not been made.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I understand that. Have you any discussion with the Leader of the Government as to why such a resolution has not been forthcoming?

The PRESIDENT: I have had discussions with the previous Leader of the Government, Michael Egan, who made it very clear that he thought there were too many committees and that most of them did not do what they were meant to do. My personal view is that the Library Committee was too large to be useful; that, in fact, every time we met it was to go over the same information each time. We did not progress. The membership of the committee was about 24. It was a huge

committee and it simply was not doing its work. That is my view about the Library Committee. I have not discussed with the new Leader of the House his view about the matter.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Thank you. Can you explain the nature of the administrative arrangements in place concerning the Parliamentary Library now? To whom do the library managers report, which Clerk and which Presiding Officer have jurisdiction?

The PRESIDENT: As you know, the position of Parliamentary Librarian has been vacant since April 2004. During the vacancy two of the three library managers, Ms Kate Curr—Manager, Systems and Information Resources—and Mr Greig Tillotson—Manager, Reference and Information—have acted in the position of Parliamentary Librarian on three-month rotations. This has provided both Kate and Greig with an opportunity to gain valuable management and leadership experience. The position description for the Parliamentary Librarian's position has been reviewed and a new position description is currently being finalised. As soon as the position description is finalised the position will be advertised and filled by merit selection.

I must say that personally I have put to the Clerks on a number of occasions the need to have that position filled. One of the reasons it has taken so long is that many other Parliaments in Australia are moving towards having a manager of information, rather than a manager of the library. My personal position has always been that I would prefer there is still to be a position known as "Parliamentary Librarian". As with every decision made in this Parliament, consultation has to occur endlessly and that really is what has been occurring about what that position should be. However, we have come to the conclusion and, as I have just said, an advertisement will be placed very soon for that position.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: In relation, therefore, to the managers who have acted in that position, what, in terms of the second part of my question, have been the reporting mechanisms of those particular persons? To which Clerk and to which Presiding Officer have they reported?

The PRESIDENT: I will hand over to John Evans.

Mr EVANS: The reporting arrangements for all of the joint departmental heads is that they report to both Clerks and both Presiding Officers. In the first instance, in relation to matters concerning the administration of the Parliamentary Library, the Legislative Assembly initiates action requiring the joint approval of the Clerks and Presiding Officers.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: So it would be the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly who would have principal carriage? Thank you. Can you explain what mechanisms are in place for members to raise any concerns they may have with the operation of the Parliamentary Library now that there is no Library Committee?

The PRESIDENT: In the same way that they raise concerns about anything at all to do with the Parliament, which is by way of letter or by speaking to the Presiding Officers or to the Clerks.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I am about to ask a series of further questions about another committee, the House Committee, and I appreciate that there might be some crossover and repetition, but that is fine. I will ask them nevertheless. Can you explain your understanding of why no resolution was put to the House reconvening a House Committee in the Fifty-Third Parliament?

The PRESIDENT: That is a decision of the Leader of the Government, to whom I have not spoken.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: The previous Leader of the Government?

The PRESIDENT: It is an ongoing decision, frankly, in that they can put that motion at any time under the new standing orders. As I say, I have not spoken to the new Leader of the Government about that decision. May I say that I am not certain that the previous House Committees were very effective.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I do not necessarily disagree with you, Madam President. I did not serve on them and, therefore, I am not able to express an opinion. Nevertheless, it is an issue that members frequently discuss with their Whips, of which I am one. However, I felt that you, as a Presiding Officer, may be able to answer the question, particularly given that this is perhaps the only forum in which we are able to ask such a question.

The PRESIDENT: I suppose you could ask Minister Della Bosca such a question.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Can you explain the nature of the administrative arrangements in place concerning Food and Beverage Services? To whom does the management report, and which Clerk and which Presiding Officer have jurisdiction?

The PRESIDENT: They are joint administrations. In respect of some services, the first reporting is to the Legislative Assembly and in respect of others the first reporting is to the Legislative Council. With regard to catering, the first reporting is to the Legislative Council. I will explain the present situation with regard to catering.

In March, April and May 2005 protected disclosures were received by the Clerk of the Parliaments involving allegations against the Manager of Food and Beverage Services and other staff in that department. Following a preliminary internal investigation to assess the protected disclosures, as required by the Protected Disclosures Act and Parliament House policy, on 2 June 2005 an independent investigator, Ms Kate Eastman, barrister at law, was appointed to advise and undertake investigations in relation to certain allegations. On the same day, Mr David Draper was suspended on pay while the investigation proceeded and was advised that a number of complaints were made regarding his actions and behaviour. Ms Eastman has conducted a number of interviews and is in the final stages of preparing her report.

On 11 April 2005 the Parliament's Internal Audit Committee agreed to request Deloitte, who are the Parliament's internal auditors, to conduct a review of the financial operation of Food and Beverage Services. The first stage of this review was to assess the existing internal controls in Food and Beverage Services. The report on the internal audit is in the process of being finalised. Mr David Draper has been requested to provide a response to the draft findings. In the meantime, Warren Cahill has taken over the day-to-day administration of Food and Beverage Services. As I said earlier, the report would be to the Clerk of the Legislative Council in the first instance.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: With regard to the resolution of both investigations, am I correct in assuming that an outcome is expected shortly?

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Are you able to be a little more specific?

The PRESIDENT: We are still awaiting David Draper's response.

CHAIR: You mentioned Mr Draper by name, and you said that other members or employees have also been suspended on pay. How many persons are involved in that?

The PRESIDENT: One other. He was suspended without pay because he was a casual employee.

CHAIR: Madam President, are you aware that Engineering Services staff have expressed concern about the need to replace out-of-date equipment? Why does the much-needed upgrade of Engineering Services equipment continue to be neglected in the Legislature budgets?

The PRESIDENT: What sort of engineering equipment are you referring to?

CHAIR: That is as far as I can go on that issue.

The PRESIDENT: I may have missed the first few words of your question.

CHAIR: I referred to some complaints that have been received by members regarding Engineering Services. Are you not aware of such complaints?

The PRESIDENT: I am totally aware of all complaints about services, but you need to say whether they are about airconditioning, sound equipment, visual equipment or the lifts. Engineering Services covers a very wide area.

CHAIR: I will leave that matter for the moment. With regard to telecommunications, has consideration been given to the installation of a voice-over Internet protocol telephony system which could reduce telephone call rates to a fraction of the standard rates?

The PRESIDENT: I will ask Mr Ali Shariat to answer that question.

Mr SHARIAT: We have considered the voice-over Internet protocol. However, the main concern with it is whether it will provide any benefit unless we include all electorate offices in the use of regional communications. The latest problem with the voice-over Internet is security and quality of service. Until those issues have been resolved, we will not go ahead with the installation of the system.

CHAIR: In another field, I have been responsible for building large city buildings of 40 storeys, and every office and every floor is connected to a wireless computer network. Why has such a system not been installed in the Parliament?

Mr SHARIAT: About a year and a half ago we took advice from a security company with regard to building a wireless system. The company recommended that if we wanted to go ahead with such a system, we should build a virtual private network for all communications. We are working on building that security all around the communications. Once that is completed, we will look at the installation of a wireless system.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Madam President, could you provide an indication of the budget given to Building Services in the last three financial years for the repair and maintenance of the Parliament House building? If I may put the question in context. Concerns have been expressed to me by staff members of the Parliament regarding occupational health and safety issues.

The PRESIDENT: I will ask Greg McGill to give a more detailed answer. However, I might say that I share your concern about maintenance of the building. My concern is not so much about everyday maintenance. In what is considered to be the new part of the building, we now have a very ageing infrastructure. It is a 1979-1980 building. Most office buildings of that age would have had one major renovation in that time, but this building has never been renovated. The appointments, carpet, and tables and chairs in the Strangers Dining Room are very old and tacky now. Many members' offices have very old fixtures, and they have power points in strange places.

I agree with you that there are some occupational health and safety concerns, and particularly in the Press Gallery. I think the 1979 building needs a major renovation, costing millions of dollars, which would necessitate members vacating the building for a period of time. That is something that I want to include in future budgets. However, as you know, we are very much at the mercy of what Treasury decides is important. But I do believe that the building needs a major renovation. I will ask Greg McGill to give you more details.

Mr McGILL: Further to Madam President's response, the Parliament's budget has been subject to some global savings across the whole of the allocation.

CHAIR: "Cuts" is the word.

Mr McGILL: Treasury likes to call it global savings. We have had to apply those global savings proportionately to each area of the Parliament, including the maintenance budget. Separate from that, however, we do have access to funding through the Department of Commerce, REPB funding, which is for repairs and maintenance to public buildings. For the year just ended the Department of Commerce, through that funding source, spent something like \$1.7 million on the Parliament building.

We have also in the last two months just completed a total asset management plan, which we have submitted to Treasury, that has identified the shortcomings and the funding requirements over the next 20 years—with the assistance of the Department of Commerce—to identify the fact that the building is ageing and a lot of the infrastructure will need replacement. We are expecting to meet with Treasury over the coming months in order to present our case in person.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Are you able to give the figures I requested in terms of the past three years? It was a specific question and I would like a specific answer.

The PRESIDENT: We will get you those answers on notice.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: In the context of those constraints it may have been very difficult, but obviously there is great concern in the community about the amount of water that is wasted, particularly because of the ageing infrastructure that Sydney Water has in place. Certainly there has been some concern expressed about what has been happening in terms of saving water here in Parliament House. I wonder whether you are able to report any water saving initiatives over the past year and whether anything is planned for the coming year, Madam President.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you for that question. It is obviously very important. Before I became President we were already looking at ways in which we could work towards a more sustainable future, and issues such as recycling have been very high. Certainly water savings has been a very important issue for Parliament. I shall mention a few of the initiatives we have put in place. We have placed electronic water meters on strategic flow points throughout the building, linked to the building management system, to ensure that our water usage is continually monitored. All of the 66 showers in the building have been fitted with water efficient shower heads. All of the 168 hand basins in the common areas have been fitted with water flow regulators to restrict water flow. All of the 73 urinals have been fitted with Zip sensors. The toilets have been reduced from a nine-litre capacity to a six-litre capacity, reducing the amount of water used by one third. Our cooling towers have had the old manual water-bleeding valves that control water flow replaced with electronically controlled auto-bleeding valves to ensure that the flow is regulated and that only the minimal amount of water is used within the towers.

There are other initiatives that we are planning for implementation in consultation with the Department of Commerce. The old butterfly valves on the water cooling towers will be replaced with new electronically-controlled valves to ensure that there is no water leakage. We are applying for funding through the Department of Energy, Utilities and Sustainability for a project to utilise rain collection tanks for our gardens and for the grassed areas, as well as exterior cleaning of the building. The basins and dishwashers in the kitchens and ministerial offices are being fitted with low-flow nozzles as they are repaired or replaced. This has occurred throughout approximately 20 per cent of the building and will continue until complete. Does anyone want to ask me what Zip sensors are?

CHAIR: We certainly do, although I must say I have not noticed them.

The PRESIDENT: On my understanding, the boring description is that they turn off automatically.

CHAIR: That is right, when you walk away. The Hon. Ian Cohen has suggested on a number of occasions that dry urinals, I think using sawdust, be used in Parliament House.

The PRESIDENT: No, a chemical, waterless urinal has been on trial on level 8 for quite a long time. I understand it was considered not to be appropriate. We have copper pipes and the chemical used was considered not to be appropriate for use with such pipes. But we seriously looked at the issue of waterless urinals.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I had a number of questions relating to information technology, but the Opposition has resolved to raise those through existing forums such as the President's Technology Advisory Group. I understand lower House members will raise similar matters in the same way. So at this point I think the Opposition rests.

CHAIR: I note that one question has been taken on notice, which will require answering within 35 calendar days. There being no further questions I declare the hearing closed and thank you, Madam President, and other officers for attending.

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
