

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 2 – HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Wednesday, 5 September 2018

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES, SOCIAL HOUSING, PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

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The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Greg Donnelly (Chair)

The Hon. Cate Faehrmann

The Hon. Paul Green

The Hon. Courtney Houssos

Mr Scot MacDonald

The Hon. Dr Peter Phelps

The Hon. Adam Searle

Mr David Shoebridge

The Hon. Bronnie Taylor

PRESENT

s

The Hon. Pru Goward, *Minister for Family and Community Services, Minister for Social Housing, and
Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault*

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**

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MICHAEL COUTTS-TROTTER, Secretary, Department of Family and Community Services, on former oath
DEIDRE MULKERIN, Deputy Secretary, Commissioning, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined

PAUL VEVERS, Deputy Secretary, Southern & Western Cluster, Department of Family and Community Services, sworn and examined

SIMONE WALKER, Deputy Secretary, Northern Cluster, Department of Family and Community Services, sworn and examined

JOHN HUBBY, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined

ANNE SKEWES, Deputy Secretary, Land and Housing Corporation, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined

MELINDA NORTON, Director, Women NSW, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2018-2019. Before I commence proceedings, I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land, and I would like to pay respect to elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present and any who may join us on the internet. I welcome Minister Goward and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Family and Community Services [FACS], Social Housing, Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. Before we commence I will make some brief comments about procedures for today's hearing.

Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast via the Parliament's website. 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 they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside of their evidence at the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they make to the media or to others after they complete their evidence, as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take an action of defamation. The guidelines for broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat.

There are some questions that a witness could only answer if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In these circumstances, witnesses are advised that they can take questions on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any messages from advisers or members of staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the committee secretariat. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. A transcript of this hearing will be available on the Parliament's website tomorrow. I remind both Committee members and witnesses to speak into the microphones. In addition, several seats have been reserved near the loudspeakers for persons in the public gallery who may have hearing difficulties. Finally, could everyone please turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing.

All witnesses from departments, statutory 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 to your office as a member of Parliament. I acknowledge that the secretary of the department took an oath this morning. I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Family and Community Services, Social Housing, Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault open for examination. 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. ADAM SEARLE: Minister, FACS has a contract with a company that provides courier services to the department. Is that correct?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I would have to ask the secretary for advice on that.

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Mr Coutts-Trotter: I would assume so.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Is that a company called Toll?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I have seen people in Toll shirts in the building, so I think that would be correct.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: How long has the contract been in place?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I would have to get that information and provide it to the Committee on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: When is it due to end?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Similarly, I would need to get that information and provide it to you.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Can you tell the Committee the annual value of that contract?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Again, I can respond on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: And how much has been spent during the term of the contract to date?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Yes, we can do that as well.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Have there been any problems with the performance of the contract on the part of the courier company?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Not to my knowledge, but I will take advice inside the agency and respond to you.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Does Mr Hubby have any knowledge of these matters?

Mr HUBBY: I have no knowledge of any problems.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Is it true that a number of sensitive documents relating to persons in FACS care or formerly in FACS care being transferred by the courier company have been lost? Are you aware of anything of that nature?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: No, I am not aware of that.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Is Mr Hubby?

Mr HUBBY: I am not aware of the specifics, no.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Are you aware of any generalities or any rumours to that effect?

Mr HUBBY: I am aware that we have had incidents with documents from time to time. In each case, they have been investigated and resolved, but I would have to take the specifics on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Okay, I will keep going. I am happy for you to take this question on notice. Is it true that on occasions when files are being transferred from one place to another—files relating to personal or confidential material—only some of the files have actually turned up at the other end when they are being transferred by the courier?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We will take that on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I am happy for you to take all of these questions on notice. Is it correct that many of these lost documents contain highly confidential and sensitive information?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Similarly, we will take that on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Is it true that some of these lost documents include the history of abuse against children in care or formerly in care?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Is it true that the lost documents include details of family violence?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Details of criminal matters and other legal issues?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Mr Searle, you would expect that we would have to take these questions on notice.

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The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: And you would expect that I am going to ask all of these questions so that they are all answered in due course. Is it also correct that the lost documents include highly sensitive details of medical records of those in FACS care or formerly in FACS care?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We will take that on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Is it correct that the department's own legal branch has also had some of its documents lost by the courier, including details of children seeking compensation due to abuse and those seeking victims or other forms of compensation?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We will take that on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Is it also true that the claimants in those cases would need access to those departmental records in order to make good their claims in many cases, and if they are lost that would deprive them of the opportunity to seek some form of redress?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We are able to take that on notice to give you a better answer.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: You accept the general proposition, though, that as Minister you are responsible legally and morally for people in FACS care?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Absolutely.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: And if documents of this kind have been lost, that is a terrible thing?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

Mr HUBBY: I would just make a comment that in any instance where client-related information is released inappropriately or has been misplaced or anything, in spite of our procedures to protect that information, we voluntarily disclose any breaches of privacy to the Privacy Commissioner and we act very proactively.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: What voluntary disclosures have you made to the Privacy Commissioner?

Mr HUBBY: I would have to take that on notice.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will have to take that on notice. Mr Searle, you should really direct your questions to me.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I am happy for you to take the questions, Minister. You are the first port of call here.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Thank you, good. I am sure we know that.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: We do. Perhaps you can tell me how many persons currently in FACS care or formerly in FACS care are now seeking compensation for abuse. Do you have any statistics around those?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: We do. We have a register of civil claimants. I have a figure in my mind, but to be cautious, again, I need to confirm it with our legal team and respond to you. They are mostly survivors of historic abuse.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Again, I would be interested to know whether there has been an increase in those numbers since the royal commission.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Yes, there most certainly has.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Obviously, raw numbers and percentages would be useful.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We could provide that.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Yes, we could.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Just to be really clear, Minister, neither you nor anybody else accompanying you today is aware of documents relating to persons in care or formerly in care being lost by the courier company?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will just confirm that. I think the view of the department is that they are not aware of any.

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The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: When documents are misplaced, if they are, what steps or protocols are in place to ensure that the persons to whom the documents relate are notified?

Ms PRU GOWARD: May I—

Mr Coutts-Trotter: As Mr Hubby suggests, when we provide a disclosure to the Privacy Commissioner, we will as a matter of routine also seek out people whose privacy may have been compromised by an omission within the agency and proactively let them know that it has happened and, on occasions, apologise appropriately.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Is there a written document about what protocols or procedures are in place—time frames, for example? I will assume that all of my questions are directed to the Minister in the first instance.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Thank you. Yes, we have policies relating to that.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Can you provide them to the Committee so we can see what the time frames are?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Yes.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Not now; obviously on notice is useful.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Sure.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Minister, is it the case that any ministerial material being brought by courier in relation to the time that you have been a Minister—are you aware of any of that material being lost or misplaced?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I would like to take that question and all other questions relating to this issue on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Of course. That is okay.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think that means that I can give you a better answer.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Of course. I am only interested in the correct answer.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, the risk of significant harm statistics, which were updated quarterly, have not been updated since the 27 September figures were collated and released in December of last year. Why is that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is a better start to your questions than it was last year, Ms Houssos. You have obviously had some training.

The CHAIR: Minister, what do you mean by that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Well, I remember last year Ms Houssos read other people's questions, and she seems to have actually asked a question that has some substance.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, how about if you—

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Let's not start that.

The CHAIR: Minister, who do you think you are, coming to this inquiry and, after being asked a question, shoot back a spiteful piece of sarcasm? Who do you think you are?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I did not know that sarcasm was banned. Goodness me.

The CHAIR: This is budget estimates, Minister. This is not the Legislative Assembly.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And is this how you behave in the Legislative Council, is it?

The CHAIR: We have a process here—

Ms PRU GOWARD: And you shout at people, do you? Keep going.

The CHAIR: We have a process of asking questions—

Ms PRU GOWARD: You are very impressive, Mr Donnelly.

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The CHAIR: Asking questions and receiving answers. That is the way it works here.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And I was about to give an answer.

The CHAIR: A question has been asked of you—

Ms PRU GOWARD: And I was about to give an answer.

The CHAIR: A straightforward question has been asked of you.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I was about to give an answer.

The CHAIR: We would ask that you turn your mind to answering the question directed to you.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And I was about to give it, Mr Donnelly, but there is no need to shout.

The CHAIR: I will continue to interrupt if I think that you are out of order.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And will you continue to shout?

The CHAIR: I will continue to interrupt if I think you are out of order.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And that means you will continue to shout at me?

The CHAIR: I will continue to interrupt if I think you are out of order, Minister.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And you will continue to shout while it is—

The CHAIR: I will continue to interrupt you if you are out of order.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Well, that's fine. But I would appreciate it if you did not shout at me.

The CHAIR: Would you like to answer the question, Minister?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I would appreciate if you answered my question.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am happy to answer the question, because we began to transform the child protection system after 16 years of disarray. We introduced the caseworker dashboard that you have referred to; that is part of the transparency you have referred to. We publish the annual child deaths report, increasing transparency. And, of course, frontline caseworkers now see a record number of children reported at risk: 15,000 more children in 2016-2017 than under Labor in 2010-2011. Our vacancy rate—which, again, you can see from the dashboard—will have dropped to 3 per cent in the March 2018 quarter, whereas under Labor it ballooned to 13 per cent in 2009-2010. The number of children in care has reduced by almost 24 per cent in the 2016-2017 financial year. Under Labor, it almost tripled—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, you would be aware this is budget estimates. There is no provision for opening statements. I have asked you a specific statement about the risk of significant harm statistics and why they have not been updated. Can you tell me why they have not been updated?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am reminding you that we do have great transparency—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You have been Minister for five of the past eight years.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, and I am very proud of our record.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It is a bit late in the day to be coming here and talking about Labor's record. What is your record?

Ms PRU GOWARD: And I am very proud of our record—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Why is this data not provided?

Ms PRU GOWARD: —particularly in transparency, because transparency drives reform.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So why has the data not been released, Minister?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will ask the secretary if he can assist you.

The CHAIR: You do not know, Minister?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will ask the secretary if he can assist you.

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The CHAIR: You do not know the answer to that important question?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think that you need to hear the answer.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Thanks, Minister.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, and we would like the answer from you, Minister.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And I am asking the secretary to answer you, as I am entitled to do under standing orders.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And before the secretary answers: Mr Secretary, have you briefed the Minister on why this information has not been published publicly?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I am more than happy to respond to the Committee as the Minister proposed.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And I am asking you a direct question. Have you briefed the Minister on why this data has not been released publicly?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: We have had a general discussion about the work we are doing to assure the data before it can be publicly released.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So, Minister, why has the data not been released publicly?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I would invite you to listen to the secretary, who is very happy to give you an answer.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But he has briefed you on this information. You are supposed to have this information as the Minister.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am asking the secretary to provide the answer.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So, you are saying, as the Minister, you do not know why this data has not been published?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, that is not what I am saying. I am saying I am inviting the secretary to answer you and I do not know why you are so concerned. Do you want the answer or not?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, I do. But we have been sitting here for 15 minutes—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Well, then, you are wasting time.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —and you are yet to answer a question yourself.

The CHAIR: I think it is obvious from the Minister's answer that she does not know the answer to the question. So I think the invitation is for the secretary to provide the answer.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Thank you, Mr Chair.

The CHAIR: So it is for him to do that.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I think, in fairness, there are probably five people inside our agency—our statistical and evaluation experts—who could provide a complete answer to the Committee about why it is the data is not yet assured for release. But in broad terms, the 2017-2018 year was a year where we moved from the KiDS system to the ChildStory system. In doing that, both the way the data is collected and some nuanced, but important, parts of how we count some of our key performance measures, particularly children seen, have changed. So the data team tells me that the performance data for 2017-2018—and the key performance measures are the number of children seen and, of course, the number of children reported at risk of significant harm where that report is substantiated—will be available for release within a matter of weeks.

The challenge was to ensure that the data is comparable over time; that the 2017-2018 data is accurate and fully comparable with the 2016-2017 data. As you would probably know, if you look at our website, where we have assured data—for example, the level of funded child protection caseworker positions and the actual vacancy rate for the three-month period—we publish that and we do that because we have assured that data. We will publish the performance data as soon as it is assured. And, as I say, the advice I have got is that that will be within a matter of weeks.

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, have you seen an initial cut of the data? Have you received an initial briefing on the data?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I receive briefings on a whole range of matters. What is important is that actually you are able to see it. That is what transparency is all about. And as the secretary has explained, when that data is properly verified it will be uploaded.

The CHAIR: Minister, that was not the question directed to you. The question was: Have you seen a preliminary cut of the data? That was the question.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And I have said that I see reports coming from the department all the time.

The CHAIR: But the answer is yes? The question was asked; you have answered in that way, so that is a yes. We just need to understand what your answers are.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Well, I have given you an answer.

The CHAIR: So the answer is yes, you have seen it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, why are you not then publicly releasing any of this data?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think the secretary has explained to you why.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But, Minister, your predecessor released this data, but you are not prepared to release data. You have received an initial briefing on it.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: No.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Because the data we release, as the secretary has explained, has to be properly verified. I will ask the secretary to explain it again.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So Minister—no. So, Minister, let me, before—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Please do not shake your hand at me. I will ask the secretary to answer you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I will ask you questions in any way that I would like to.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Right. So you have the same standard of manners as—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will not be lectured about manners from you.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Well, then, stop shaking your hand at me.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will ask you a question about our most vulnerable children—

Ms PRU GOWARD: And you should

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —in any way that I like.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Right.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And I am telling you now, I would like to know—

Ms PRU GOWARD: We are telling me now? Right. Just ask the question.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I would like to know why you are not releasing this data publicly. Why do you have a veil of secrecy over the Department of Family and Community Services in this case?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Hang on, I was the Minister who introduced this level of transparency.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Absolutely.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Absolutely so "Thank you very much, Minister".

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So why are you not releasing the information?

Ms PRU GOWARD: You have been told the answer but I know you did not listen because you have it written out. You do not understand what the secretary has said. I will ask him to repeat the answer.

The CHAIR: Minister, it is not for you to judge the interpretation of the answer by a member. It is—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Chair—

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The CHAIR: Hang on.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I see, we are going to shout again.

The CHAIR: No, I am not shouting. I am saying it is not for you to engage in—I think I understand what your interpretation is. The member has asked a question and is trying to get the answer. It is going back and forth, and that is the way it should proceed.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And the secretary has given the answer.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, you have seen this data. You are refusing to tell the public about it. Did you use this data? Did you use initial briefings of this data as the basis for the budget for this year?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We use data that is properly verified.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What data did you use then for the basis of the budget for this next 12 months?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am sorry, I do not understand your question.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You are saying that you do not have verified data.

Ms PRU GOWARD: For that quarter, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So what data did you use to formulate your budget for the department for the next 12 months? Or did you use out-of-date data?

Ms PRU GOWARD: The formulation of the budget relies on an enormous amount of data. I would invite the secretary if he can add further to that. But I think you will find it will not be based on merely some indicative data that has yet to be verified. As you might know, the budget is well underway by the time the March quarter figures would have been available.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: We have not presented any of the data to the Minister because we will not until it is assured and verified. The data that we used in discussions internally was the trend data up to and including the 2016-17 financial year.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Minister, if I could return to the issue of the couriers, do the couriers actually transport around confidential information of the kind I was asking about before?

Ms PRU GOWARD: This is very much an operational matter, Mr Searle.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I am happy for the departmental secretary or someone—you have a lot of people here, Minister. One of them must be able to answer this question.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, I know. I am happy for them to answer.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I think they do, but I am not 100 per cent confident. I turn to Mr Hubby, he might know.

Mr HUBBY: Yes, but there are varying relationships and arrangements around the State.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: You are accepting that confidential material relating to persons in care and formerly in care are couriered around by a private courier company, not by departmental staff? Is that what you are telling me?

Mr HUBBY: I would rather not answer in generalities. I would rather answer a specific question.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Information about child abuse, information relating to medical records, information relating to legal matters, to family breakdown and dysfunction, confidential sensitive health records relating to persons in care or formerly in care.

Mr HUBBY: The vast majority—

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Could you answer the question? Is that material being ferried around the State and around Sydney by a private company?

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Mr HUBBY: The vast majority of information is shared digitally or electronically. So it would be an exception to the rule to courier hard copy records. That is why I am very hesitant to answer the question definitively. I would really need to look at a specific question.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: We might come back to this.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, why are you refusing to become a paid member of Our Watch?

Ms PRU GOWARD: My great interest is investing in frontline services that support victims and hold perpetrators to account. I am aware that the NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team's recommendation was for New South Wales to join Our Watch. I have certainly met with Our Watch in the past. We have very carefully considered all of the recommendations made by the death review team, but I can advise that the Government has decided not to put hundreds of thousands of dollars into another membership subscription. Our focus is to invest our money into frontline services and supports.

We are already contributing via the Third Action Plan, The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022, and through the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] advisory panel. We are also a founding member of Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety [ANROWS], which was established in July 2013 and was provided with over half a million dollars in 2017 by the New South Wales Government to continue its support for ANROWS and their research agenda, in particular, building the evidence base for effective ways to eventually reduce domestic and family violence. We again are contributing funding to ANROWS this year. I think, interestingly, the Domestic and Family Violence Innovation Fund—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That is fine, Minister. I think you are going into too much detail on that answer. Just in terms of your response that you are putting your effort into frontline services—

Ms PRU GOWARD: And some research.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: —and some research, does that mean you are not prioritising primary prevention?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Not at all. It means that we have launched a \$20 million innovation fund which is focused primarily on prevention and early intervention. In fact, I think we are the first State in Australia to have such a significant fund devoted to innovative ways of exploring the prevention of domestic and family violence.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Back to Our Watch and their framework Change the Story—which, as I understand it and which I have had a look at, is fantastic—it is a national evidence-based framework centred around one essential fact: that to end violence against women and their children it must be recognised that gender inequality is the core of the problem and the heart of the solution. Do you support this premise, this fact?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I certainly think gender inequality is a significant feature of domestic violence, of course.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In terms of Our Watch and Change the Story, there has been quite a bit of disquiet amongst domestic violence experts around the country and here in New South Wales amongst quite a few that I have spoken with that it seems to be almost a personal response by you as Minister to not become a paid member of Our Watch and to refuse to support Change the Story. Is that true?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, can you tell me whether you support these essential actions from Change the Story, the shared framework that every other State and Territory has adopted? I just wanted to know whether this is something that the Government agrees with. You have said that gender equality is essentially the core of the problem and the heart of the solution to family violence.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think it is a very important contributor, yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: One of the essential actions that Change the Story states is absolutely essential to addressing family violence is to challenge men's use of controlling behaviours in relationships and the subtle normalisation of male dominance in relationships. Is that something that the New South Wales Government is wanting to challenge as well? Are there any programs that look at that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think we also need to challenge controlling behaviour in any relationship. As you would know, there is a significant proportion of the gay community who report domestic and family violence.

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That is not a gender issue; that is a control issue. I think that the essential part of this is about controlling behaviour, which is why we have addressed the issue of the precursors to domestic violence being controlling behaviour.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But largely it is men's use of controlling behaviours in terms of family violence, yes? You just seem to have avoided that and gone on to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer [LGBTIQ] relationships.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Because I am making the point that the essential fact is about who is controlling who.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Which is?

Ms PRU GOWARD: In many, many heterosexual relationships it will be men controlling women. Not always but usually. And similarly in homosexual relationships it will be one or other of the parties.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So what programs is the Government putting in place to address the role of gendered norms, if you like, stereotypes of masculinity and femininity and the role that that plays in family violence?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think you will see the work we are doing in schools. We have introduced the first compulsory domestic violence element into school education through the personal development, health and physical education [PDHPE] course and that runs up until year 11. That course will have a domestic violence component in it.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That challenges gender norms of masculinity, that is what that program does?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, not entirely. It addresses domestic violence more generally, but it will certainly challenge the idea of controlling behaviour and people's right to control other people and the respect that they need to have for other people.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You have the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy 2017-2021, what is the percentage of spending in this strategy on primary prevention as opposed to services?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will ask the secretary if he can give you the details.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I will invite my colleague, Ms Mulkerin, to address that please.

Ms MULKERIN: We will need to take on notice the specific question about how much funding of the total domestic violence spend is on primary prevention. As the Minister has already outlined, there are a number of programs that are funded specifically focused on perpetrators to minimise violence, such as the men's behaviour change programs within Justice, the EQUIPS programs; Police, of course, are running high-risk offender teams; and some community-based programs such as Tackling Violence. There are a number of programs that are funded across government, not just within FACS, that focus specifically on perpetrators of violence.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What are some of the differences that you personally see between the Change the Story framework and the strategy that the New South Wales Government has chosen to adopt instead about the way in which Change the Story focuses on gender equality? What are some of the core differences that you see between your approach, Minister, and the rest of the country's?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Before I ask the secretary to answer that—and I am not sure that it is possible to give an answer today—might I say that the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research [BOCSAR] data demonstrates that New South Wales has a reduction in the rate of victimisation for domestic and family violence much more significant than elsewhere in Australia, where in fact the victimisation rate has gone up. Grievous bodily harm associated with domestic violence over the eight years to 2016-17 has reduced by 15½ per cent. BOCSAR—a very credible, criminal statistical organisation—would confirm that what we are doing in domestic violence is absolutely on the right track.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Has the New South Wales Government developed a specific violence prevention strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children in New South Wales that is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Again, I will refer to my colleague.

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Ms MULKERIN: I think we would need to take that on notice in order to correctly answer that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That sounds like a "no".

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, it means we will take it on notice.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Within your department you obviously have a family violence strategy that you are here today to talk to this Committee about and you are not sure whether there is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategy led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Wow! Okay.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Noting the high rates of homelessness and contact with the justice system experienced by young people leaving the out-of-home care system at the age of 18, the Tasmanian Government recently committed to a policy of voluntary extended foster care to the age of 21. Has the New South Wales Government considered such a comprehensive approach to continuing care in New South Wales to ensure appropriate care and support to the State's most vulnerable young people?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is a very important question and I will just confer. The legislation provides support for such up to the age of 25, but I will ask the secretary if we have some more detail on the program specifically.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Probably the most significant initiative—and my colleague Ms Mulkerin may want to pitch in on this—is the Premier's Youth Initiative that exclusively targets young people who are coming up to leaving care. For many young people leaving care is notional only in that they stay living where they are, they stay in the permanent family arrangement. But for some young people that is not the case, and some young people do not want it to be the case, they want to move. You are right to underline the very, very elevated risk of homelessness experienced by young people in those circumstances. The Premier's Youth Initiative enables us to provide supports, mentoring services, for around 430 young people this year. My colleague Ms Mulkerin might like to provide further information.

Ms MULKERIN: It is never good to correct your secretary.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Always good to correct your secretary.

The CHAIR: It just shows that he is not perfect.

Ms MULKERIN: The number is actually 446 places this year.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: He was not that far off.

Ms MULKERIN: He was very close. As the secretary and the Minister have already outlined, there are a number of initiatives that are underway to specifically focus on young people who have been in out-of-home care who are at risk of homelessness exiting out-of-home care. The secretary has called out specifically the Premier's Youth Initiative. It targets young people leaving out-of-home care who are likely to become homeless or at risk of homelessness. It aims to divert this group from entering the homelessness system altogether by providing them with a combination of personal advice, mentoring, transitional support and accommodation. We are progressively rolling that out across the State.

We are currently supporting around 188 young people and by the end of the year and early next year that number will grow to 446. There are other specific programs that focus on this group of young people to minimise their risk of entering the homelessness system, such as private rental products, for example Rent Choice Youth, which is specifically targeted at young people who are at risk of homelessness, and again provides them with support, both personal support and brokerage, and assistance to pay private rental. There is a whole raft of programs.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And it is very encouraging to see that we have moved 31.3 per cent of young people into long-term accommodation.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Absolutely, given the tragic result of those who end up on the street in some sort of exploitation or trafficking. It is very important to get them off the street. Minister, the Committee heard about leaving care plans being completed by only 30 per cent of the non-government organisations [NGOs]. This came from the recommendations of the inquiry about NGOs having more accountability to ensure that they have completed care plans for youth leaving care. Has there been an increase in that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I would like to ask the secretary if he can answer that.

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Mr Coutts-Trotter: New permanency support reforms have seen us both recontract with non-government providers of care and also ask them to deliver different services, explicitly family preservation and family unification. As I recall, as part of that recontracting we have introduced some additional measures of performance, and one of those is making sure that both FACS, as an accredited out-of-home care provider, and non-government partners track and report on and help to account for the preparation of quality leaving care plans.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I will keep going. I have many questions for this session.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: And to the question of how we are performing; we are happy to take that question on notice and provide a response.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, how many organisations working with children and families have had funding agreements terminated before the end of their contracted term?

Ms PRU GOWARD: You are referring to the non-government sector?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Yes.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I have some material on that.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: You can take that on notice.

Ms PRU GOWARD: As you know, I have always believed in the importance of the non-government sector and the contribution it can make.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Absolutely.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have partnerships with a great number of NGOs, small and large, all over New South Wales. We fund them in child welfare and foster care, we fund community housing providers, we fund specialist homelessness services, we fund domestic violence services, we fund early intervention and community strengthening services, and in fact historically they have always played a significant role. Our oldest non-government organisations have provided services and support for well over a century. They include the Benevolent Society, Barnardo's, St Vincent de Paul, and the wonderful Wayside Chapel more recently.

Non-government organisations have evolved to provide some of the most valued services. We have a particularly strong partnership with non-government organisations in the out-of-home-care sector. Thanks to the recommendation of Justice Wood, we have managed to transfer a significant amount of out-of-home care to the non-government sector. In the 2017-18 financial year, we funded more than 1,500 service providers across almost 2,900 contracts, and the value of that funding was \$1.2 billion. I will ask the secretary to provide additional information.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: We will have to take that question on notice.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am happy for you to do that. How many of the recommendations in the 2017 report of the inquiry into child protection have been implemented, and which recommendations has the Government implemented?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Is that the upper House inquiry?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Are there any others? I am guessing my recommendation was not implemented.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, thank you for nothing. The New South Wales Government has very carefully considered the recommendations in the Legislative Council's Portfolio Committee No. 2 report following the inquiry into child protection. We provided the Parliament with an updated response on 18 September last year and also a progress report at the end of August this year on the implementation of the recommendations and improvements that have been made to the child protection system. We are undertaking a range of child protection reforms that address many of your recommendations. Legislative changes made in 2014 certainly provided for a greater focus on permanency for children, whether that be through restoration or open adoption. When parents cannot change, our priority must be—as I think your committee agreed—finding the child a safe, permanent and loving home for life.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Absolutely.

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Ms PRU GOWARD: That is why we have invested an additional \$190 million over four years to transform the child protection system. That includes \$90.5 million to support parents to change, because that is obviously the best outcome.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: The question was how many of the recommendations have been implemented. Do you have a figure?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: We have a copy of our response to the Legislative Council that provides a status update on the implementation of each of the recommendations.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I simply want to know how many of the recommendations you have implemented.

Ms PRU GOWARD: As you know, some have been implemented.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I simply want the numerical total. If you do not have it here, I am happy for the question to be taken on notice.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you want the document tabled?

Ms PRU GOWARD: It was tabled in the Parliament at the end of August.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Is that the original response?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, it is the response tabled in August this year.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It would be helpful if we could have that number.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will see if we can get it by the end of the day.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: How many Family and Community Services caseworkers, including case managers, casework specialists, Aboriginal caseworkers, Joint Investigation Response Team caseworkers, helpline caseworkers and casework support workers are there? You can take that question on notice.

Ms PRU GOWARD: The March dashboard has the funded positions for full-time equivalent caseworkers.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That is fine, because I want to know what is the current caseload for a Family and Community Services caseworker.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will ask the secretary to answer that question because it relates to operational matters.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: The average caseload in statutory child protection would vary between six and 10. The range for our out-of-home-care caseworkers would vary between 12 and 18. The variation happens because there are different levels of complexity in the families with whom the caseworkers deal and they may be at different points, particularly in interaction with the court system, which is very time consuming.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I understand that. Nurses have different caseloads.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: The "Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Consultation Paper: Records and recordkeeping practices" states that poor records and recordkeeping can cause trauma to those who have suffered abuse. Would you accept that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: It further states that distress at the loss or damage of those records can be devastating. Would you also accept that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Given those acceptances by you, why is such sensitive personal material being transported and handled by non-departmental staff in the form of Toll couriers? I think Mr Hubby accepted that they were at least in part transporting this sensitive material around the State and around Sydney.

Ms PRU GOWARD: As Mr Hubby has said, a great deal of that information is now moved electronically. I think the royal commission showed us that children need to be believed and, as you say, adult

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survivors of childhood abuse need to be supported to heal. Not being believed and then reading records they know are not accurate would only add to their trauma. I will ask the secretary to respond.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: It is a policy question.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think you will find there are arrangements that ensure we meet very high standards of privacy and security.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: That may be so, but my question related to policy. Why is your Government allowing such personal and sensitive material—criminal histories, abuse histories and medical records—to be handled and transported by non-departmental staff given how important those documents are to those in care or formerly in care?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will ask the secretary to answer that question. However, this obviously relates to the security and privacy arrangements in those contracts.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I was going to respond to your reference to the royal commission's research paper and reiterate that we understand how important a care leaver's records are to them. One of the real focuses in recent days has been to provide a far more supportive and rapid response to people who approach us for their historic records, and particularly those seeking compensation for their experiences in care. You will find that we do not require them to gather any of that kind of information. We provide them with that information freely with an average 28-day turnaround.

I make that point in case you were concerned that we do not understand the importance of care leaver records to people's wellbeing, their sense of self and their discovery, often for the first time, of what happened to them many years ago; we do. Mr Hubby talked earlier about wanting to provide a detailed response to the Committee. In contracting with providers of all types, we are acutely aware of the criticality of the privacy of the information we hold.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I understand that. However, Minister, I am asking you to answer the policy question. These are very sensitive, very personal and very important documents. Why, as a matter of policy, is your Government allowing non-government staff to handle and to transport this sensitive material? It is a straightforward question.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will have to get the facts on exactly what we do. I will take the question on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: How long have these arrangements been in place allowing non-government staff to handle this material?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is one of the questions you would like answered?

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: It is.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We will do that.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I think both Mr Coutts-Trotter and Mr Hubby acknowledged that there were previous examples of sensitive information of this kind being misplaced or lost.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: No, I was recollecting cases where we had breached someone's privacy. However, none of those cases conformed to the scenario you are describing.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: What about Mr Hubby's recollection? My recollection of Mr Hubby's evidence is that he has some memory of instances of files being lost.

Mr HUBBY: My answer is the same as the secretary's; that is, in any instance of client privacy or the privacy of anyone in our care being breached, we disclose that breach. As I said, I was answering in the same way as the secretary.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Mr Hubby, is it your evidence under oath that you have no recollection or knowledge of any files being lost at any time, including by transportation by the courier company?

Mr HUBBY: To my knowledge, to my recollection.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: You have not had any conversations with persons inside or outside the department about the loss of files of the kind we have been discussing.

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Mr HUBBY: I do not want to say that I have never had any conversation about a loss of files—

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: That you can recall.

Mr HUBBY: —including client information that I can recall.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Minister, I am happy for you, Mr Coutts-Trotter or any person with you to answer: How many of these privacy breaches have occurred in the past 12 months and can you tell us the circumstances? Again, I am happy for you to take that on notice.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think we will need to take that on notice.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Yes.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Minister, do you or any of the departmental staff with you today have any knowledge of any instances of any of these sensitive files being lost temporarily or permanently?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Just for clarification, "sensitive files" being files containing personal information—

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Personal information about persons in care or formerly in care.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: To the best of my knowledge, no.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Is that the same for every departmental official with you today, Minister?

Ms MULKERIN: Not aware.

Ms WALKER: Not aware.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And there is nodding from Mr Vevers and Ms Skewes.

Ms SKEWES: That we are not aware.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And also Ms Norton, for the transcript.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: And you will provide further information about the data breaches, how many and the circumstances in the past 12 months.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Without in turn further breaching someone's privacy, yes.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I would not invite you to do that, Mr Coutts-Trotter. Is the department now seeking to end its contract with Toll, Minister?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is very operational. I will have to ask the secretary to answer it.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Does the secretary have any knowledge?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I have no knowledge of that, I am afraid.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I make the observation that it is strange that no-one at the table with you, Minister, has any knowledge about the details of a courier contract with the department—none of the details I have asked for: when it was entered into, its duration, how much money it involves, whether you are trying to even terminate the contract. Whatever the answers are, how is it that neither you nor anyone at the table—there are a lot of you—have any knowledge about this?

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have a number—well, hundreds—of contracts. Perhaps you could have let me know and I am sure we could have provided you with some material. But as it is we will take it on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I look forward to the material that you will provide.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, can you tell me what the total number of vacant housing in New South Wales is at 30 June 2017?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Can I just clarify, do you mean public housing or social housing?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Public and social housing. You are the Minister for Social Housing.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes. So you mean community housing providers as well?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What breakdown of the data do you have?

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Ms PRU GOWARD: According to the Australian Government Productivity Commission Report on Government Services, in 2018 we have recorded a public housing occupancy rate of 98.1 per cent. That compares with the national average of 97.1 per cent, so it is quite favourable. On average, more than 200 social housing dwellings in New South Wales are vacated by tenants each week. I am sure you would know that when a tenant has vacated a property we, like any private landlord, have a responsibility to ensure that that property is clean, safe and habitable before it is re-let. I presume you would not want to see us re-letting unclean and unsuitable properties, so that is what may take the time.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you saying that there are 2,000 properties vacated every week?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, 200.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My apologies—200 that are vacated every week. I think we are reading the same report, the Productivity Commission Report on Government Services. I have done a bit of quick maths from that 98.1 per cent and I come up with 2,094 vacant properties. Is that correct?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will ask the secretary to answer that, but 200 are vacated by tenants each week and there are 52 weeks in the year. I will ask the secretary if he can help you.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Yes, I would need to confirm the Productivity Commission's counting rule unless my colleague Ms Anne Skewes is familiar with it, but I think it is an annualised figure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am happy to provide the data. I think we are all reading from the same report. You are saying that we are at a 98.1 per cent occupancy rate, according to the data. According to this, in public housing we have 109,384 properties—does that sound about right?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Are you referring to public housing or social housing?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Public housing.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Let me see if that confirms my figures—public housing properties, 112,550 is my number.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You have slightly higher.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Perhaps—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you do some quick maths then we are going to come to 2,094 vacant.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am not going to do quick maths; I am not confident of my quick maths. What was your question?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My question is: How many vacant properties are in New South Wales at the moment? I am not interested in the turnover rate. I am interested in how many vacant properties are sitting there as 60,000 people languish on the public housing waiting list.

Ms PRU GOWARD: At any point in time, as you can imagine, that number would vary considerably.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, but the Productivity Commission report says that it is 2,094.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: No. Sorry, I do not mean to debate a point without having the counting rule in front of me but it does not translate that way. We do not right now have 2,094 vacant properties and there is never a day on which we do. We can provide a response on notice, point in time.

Ms SKEWES: It is a very precise question and I think it is probably best to provide a response to you on notice once we have the data in front of us.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. I am interested in knowing, Minister, why so many properties—because this is a significant decrease, and if we want to talk about records, when Labor was last in government it was 99.9 per cent was the vacancy rate according to the Productivity Commission—

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Actually that figure was wrong and was subsequently corrected.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The 99.9 per cent?

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Mr Coutts-Trotter: The 99.9 per cent was wrong and was subsequently corrected by the Productivity Commission.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Anyway, to your point, we have got vacant properties. Our purpose is to ensure that vacant restoration is achieved as quickly as possible. We have to stop vandalism. Any unnecessary delays in the re-letting process mean, as you say, people wait on the housing list. We want people to take up their residences as soon as possible but we are a responsible landlord. Sometimes significant property damage is incurred and that takes time to repair.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We will wait to see that information provided on notice. I will move on. Last week the Audit Office of New South Wales issued a performance audit into managing antisocial behaviour in social housing. The report makes reference to a 2017 Family and Community Services [FACS] internal evaluation into the efficacy of antisocial behaviour and management policy. Has that evaluation been made public?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think it is fantastic that we are all now interested in antisocial behaviour because before I became the Minister there was no clear process to deal with minor or infrequent antisocial behaviour and there were certainly no supports given, and it is a very significant issue for our tenants. There was no ability to seek a guaranteed termination of a tenancy for certain serious illegal and severe antisocial behaviour. In fact, I think it was tolerated and other tenants were just expected to put up with it. So there was a need for moral courage and, in fact, the need to protect the rights of others in public housing. Our antisocial behaviour policy delivers a system that ensures we are actually quite tough on instances of severe and illegal antisocial behaviour. It allows tenants at the lower end of that behavioural spectrum to be supported to change their behaviour.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Again, Minister, I am going to stop you there. I asked you a specific question about whether this internal FACS evaluation has been made public. Is that a yes or a no?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I certainly know that the Auditor-General's report said that it was too early to tell whether the policy has made a substantial difference. A survey of 2,000 tenants conducted earlier this year showed that over 90 per cent of tenants who are aware of our antisocial behaviour policy are in favour of it because they lead better lives as a result.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, your testimony is that it is working or are you trying to say that the Audit Office is saying it is too early to evaluate?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am not "trying to say". That is what the Audit Office said.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Did you release the internal evaluation that has formulated that view for you?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will have to ask if we released anything publicly, but we have some fantastic indications from our antisocial behaviour dashboard, which is online, that the issuing of a warning or a strike certainly makes a difference in changing tenant behaviour. Of the 1,865 tenants that were issued with a warning as at 13 June this year, only 269 went on to receive a strike notice, and only 15 have received three strike notices. That tells you that once you give people warnings and you offer them the opportunity of support, the behaviour can change. That is wonderful for our tenants—all of our tenants

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You are saying now that antisocial behaviour is under control in public housing in New South Wales.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am not saying that, but I am saying that that is a terrific improvement.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It is your legislation that has been in force now for three years. You introduced it into the Parliament. It is your signature policy, it sounds like. You are trying to say that things are okay here.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Are you not impressed? I do not know whether you hear from social housing tenants but I know from the letters I receive from your colleagues—and, indeed, from Greens members—how often antisocial behaviour is raised with me. I think the fact that we have been able to issue a warning to over 1,800 tenants and that only a fraction of those have gone on to receive a strike, tells you—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So, Minister, I would like to draw you—

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Ms PRU GOWARD: —that the warning and the provision of support is a very wise way of helping people with antisocial behaviour.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I would like to—

Ms PRU GOWARD: You would know that many people—

The CHAIR: Minister, we are trying to get the questions in. I am giving you latitude. I think there are further questions.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Minister, have there been meetings between FACS and Toll about concerns relating to missing and lost files?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Mr Searle, I am sorry, I do know the answer. I will have to ask the department.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Not to my knowledge. To your earlier observation, I may just make the point that we contract around \$3.1 billion worth of public money across a variety of organisations so I do not think it is unusual that there is nobody at the table that has first-hand knowledge of it. We will double-check and provide an answer on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Apart from that question, I would also like to know the dates of any meetings and what was discussed at those meetings.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: We will take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I would like to draw your attention to a tenant located in Daceyville. Isobel is an 81-year-old public housing tenant. She has had two apprehended violence orders [AVOs] issued against her neighbour due to physical threats, verbal abuse and harassment. Isobel is terrified and she does not know what to do. Her daughter was forced to stay with her this past weekend, and she cannot leave her own house. She has stated—this must be deeply traumatic—that she wants to kill herself because she knows that when the AVO expires in March her neighbour will probably kill her. Police event numbers have been given to the Department of Housing in Maroubra. Why has she not been prioritised for a transfer of housing?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I would be very happy to meet with her. I am sorry that she is in so much distress. As I said, we have an antisocial behaviour policy. This is the first time it has really been vigorously pursued, and the results so far are very good. But, as I said, we are not claiming that it is a perfect result. I will ask the secretary if the secretary can point to anything further we could do.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: If you want to provide us with some information outside the Committee we would be more than happy to pursue it straight away.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I put to you that the reason this antisocial behaviour policy is not working is because it is not appropriately resourced. This is from the Auditor-General's report: Only five out of the 27 housing officers have an antisocial behaviour specialist staff member. Why do the majority of housing offices not have these staff?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think we should all be pleased we have an antisocial behaviour policy and that we have people who can support it within the department.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, it is a question of resourcing. You have introduced this policy and you have not introduced enough resources to do it.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I seem to remember 16 years when you changed legislation and you never did any resourcing.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You have been Minister for five of the past eight years.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It is time that you started taking responsibility. Twenty out of the 25 housing offices, the Auditor-General found, were under-resourced to manage antisocial behaviour.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I did welcome the Auditor-General's recommendations on improving the implementation of the policy, which is in line with improvements that were already underway. That means that we link connection with a support service with the issuing of a warning letter. We have updated the antisocial behaviour system [HOMES-ASB] to ensure better functionality for staff. All client service officers and senior

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client service officers complete a module on antisocial behaviour management as part of a leadership, engagement and professional training program, which will provide staff with a Certificate IV in Social Housing. So we are addressing the issues raised. I am disappointed to think that you do not think the policy is working. I think we can say that there are very positive indications from our antisocial behaviour dashboard—another example of transparency.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My time has expired. I would just like one last thing to be put on the record from the secretary—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You will have another round.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —which is the clarification from the Government Productivity Commission.

The CHAIR: Mr David Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, thank you for coming. In the financial year 2016-17 there were 129 children adopted from out-of-home care—at least, according to your dashboard. How many children were adopted from out-of-home care in the last financial year?

Ms PRU GOWARD: In 2017-18?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes.

Ms PRU GOWARD: One hundred and forty.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How many, if any, of those children were identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander for both years?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I do have those numbers. It was a very small number. In 2017-18, six Aboriginal children were adopted from care.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Six in the last year. In 2016-17?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Two.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are currently in out-of-home care in New South Wales? Whilst you are looking at that table, could you also tell me the total number of children in out-of-home care.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes. They are terribly over-represented but we have, as you know, achieved a decrease of almost 20 per cent.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We will come to that.

Ms PRU GOWARD: There were 1,058 Aboriginal children and young people entering care. That makes the total number of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care just over 7,000—7,152.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What is the total cohort or the non-Aboriginal cohort—it does not matter; however it is best—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Could somebody give me the total number of children in out-of-home care, because Mr Shoebridge will want the precise number?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I have the number at June 2017. We have preliminary but not confirmed data for—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: For 2018?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: The data for 2017 is confirmed. We only have preliminary data for 2018.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Perhaps you could give us the confirmed data and then the preliminary data.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: It is 7,571 Aboriginal children on care and protection orders at that point.

Ms PRU GOWARD: What about the total population? That was the number I was looking for. We have it somewhere. Keep asking questions and we will find it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: My next question is about the rate of removals.

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Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Yes, sure.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What is the rate of removal of Aboriginal children compared with their non-Aboriginal counterparts?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As you know, we have reduced it by almost 24 per cent. I have to say, for 10 years under Labor the number of Aboriginal children in care quadrupled. So we have coming off a very high base.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There has been a shameful history across the board—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —in dealing with Aboriginal child removals.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I just want you to record that we are coming off a high base.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There was a catastrophic increase over the past 10 years. I am asking about that is happening now.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I think, from memory, it is about six times the rate of non-Aboriginal children.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, I put a freedom of information request to the Department about the number of children who enter FACS with an identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and the number of children who had had that status changed over the past four years. Are you aware—

Ms PRU GOWARD: What do you mean "changed"?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They have been de-identified. They have had their Aboriginal status removed during the time they are with FACS. Are you aware of this happening in the department?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am not aware, but that does not mean—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Coutts-Trotter might be able to assist.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: There are concerns both ways. There are concerns that children who are not Aboriginal are identified as Aboriginal, and there are concerns that some Aboriginal children are, as you say, de-identified. There are reasons why an Aboriginal child's identity is not known until much later in our work. That is an understandable feature. As I say, I will hear from Aboriginal colleagues that they are worried that there is an over-identification of Aboriginal children in some districts.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I have had repeated concerns to my office from lawyers, including people within the department, about the increase in de-identification, the number of Aboriginal children who are having their Aboriginal identity removed following a decision by the department. It is for that reason that I asked for the data. I think you would agree with me that data would be important, Minister?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will ask the secretary to answer. I think, Mr Shoebridge, that we will have to take it on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will let you know what happened. I am happy for you to take it on notice and I appreciate it. When I asked for the data I was told in a decision that I really just received, I think either yesterday or the day before, that this data was not captured; it was not in the department and that the department has advised that it would be required to interrogate the internal audit log in the key information directory system for all children that identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. There are currently no standard reports that enable it to extract that information and it would have to employ special technical skills.

Ms PRU GOWARD: So what are you suggesting, Mr Shoebridge?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What I am suggesting is that this information should be known and captured and if it requires a small additional amount of resourcing to capture and find information, I was just hoping you would take that on board?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I can certainly consider that. I would want to be convinced, and I do not know the resourcing implications of changing our data systems, but I do know how significant an issue it is.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: As I understand it, it is not a question of changing your data systems; it is just writing the program to extract the data from the current system.

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Ms PRU GOWARD: Right. Well, if it is as simple as that, what do you think, Mr Coutts-Trotter?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I think we will provide advice to you very quickly on whether we can do it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thank you. I will hand you a copy. Minister, there is a very real concern that the process of de-identification is one of the ways that has been used by the department, consciously or unconsciously, to drive down the proportion of Aboriginal children in the system. I thought I would raise that concern with you now—

Ms PRU GOWARD: I find that abhorrent.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —and allow either Ms Mulkerin or anyone from your department to address that concern—

Ms PRU GOWARD: I find that abhorrent.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —because that concern has been repeatedly directed to my office.

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, that would be terrible.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I think the reason we are seeing fewer children and fewer Aboriginal children come into care is that our practice has changed and we increasingly have available to us more options for family support services for families and we are seeing more children, which means we are getting involved in families earlier in a trajectory of building crisis when there are more options other than bringing children into care. But I think there has been a whole range of things that, taken together, have fundamentally changed the culture, outlook and practice of the agency.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thank you, Mr Coutts-Trotter. The guiding principles for strengthening participation of the local Aboriginal community and child protection were adopted I think in 2015. One of the key outcomes of that is the establishment of local advisory groups [LAC]. Again when I talk to communities across the State they say it is very difficult to have them established, they have been very slow going and whilst there are small pockets of the department that are on board and assisting, by and large there is indifference and bureaucratic lack of engagement. Can you tell me how many local advisory groups have been established and where, and when we can expect more advisory groups to be established?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will ask Mr Coutts-Trotter to answer that, but may I say I find that most surprising. My experience as both a local member and as Minister is that the department is punctilious about Aboriginality.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The response I get back is quite different to that—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, I am hearing that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —but it is patchy; there are pockets of positive engagement.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There are real concerns across other parts, so where have LAGs been established and where are they likely to be established?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: There are 13 LAGs at the moment and I do not have a locational list in my mind. As you would probably be aware, we meet regularly; I meet regularly with Grandmothers Against Removal [GMAR] NSW. If there are any concerns expressed about particular locations, I would be more than happy to receive them to see if we can act on it. I, at the request of GMAR, have produced communications internally to explain what the guiding principles require of us and that is essentially that we work alongside and walk alongside Aboriginal people in keeping kids safe. Our responsibility is to respond positively where local Aboriginal communities come to us and ask us to establish a LAC.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If you could tender that correspondence—

Ms PRU GOWARD: A redacted—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —or at least a representative subset of that correspondence with whatever necessary redactions are appropriate, I would appreciate that.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Okay. Sorry, the correspondence?

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well you said you correspond with the department and you advise it in writing about the importance of this.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Oh, sure. It was a video and related material.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In answer to the interim response to the child protection inquiry the department has said FACS is developing Aboriginal case management policy and guidelines. I have to say I am surprised that we are so far down the track and FACS has not yet finalised or have a final set of Aboriginal case management policy and guidelines. Much criticism has been directed—so much angst—so why has it not been finalised? When will it be finalised?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I appreciate your question and Mr Coutts-Trotter will answer it.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: We have worked with the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat [AbSec] to produce the case management policy and guidelines. I will just check with my colleague, Deirdre Mulkerin, on the current status.

Ms MULKERIN: We are very close to completion in the negotiation with AbSec.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do we have a proposed time frame? It has been years in the making. What does "very close" mean? Is it 2020, 2019—

Ms MULKERIN: No.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Late 2018—

Ms MULKERIN: No.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Tomorrow?

Ms MULKERIN: No, it does not mean 2020. As your reference, we have been working alongside our colleagues in AbSec to finalise the policies. As I understand it—I checked this morning suspecting it might be a question—I am advised that we are finalising some of the fine details with AbSec so it is down to a handful of issues still to be resolved.

The CHAIR: The Hon. Paul Green.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Mr Coutts-Trotter, could you clarify this for me again. You talked about the current caseload for FACS caseworkers?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Yes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I think you said six to 10 caseloads—

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Yes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: —and then you said 12 to 18?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Yes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: You clarified what those different sections were. Could you clarify that?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Sorry, the six to 10 is statutory child protection so people who are responding to reports of significant harm; 12 to 18 is the expected range for FACS child protection caseworkers working in out-of-home care.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: How many caseworkers would be required to provide a response to every substantiated report?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As you know, we have expanded the number of caseworkers in this year's budget, as we did last year, and that is why we are confident we can see more children. As you know, there are other children who are reported via mandatory reports and they of course are in services so they are, in a sense, being seen. I will ask the secretary to answer.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: It might be helpful if we took it on notice and provided you with the details. We have three pilots in place at the moment where the aim is for us to see what it would take to both make changes inside FACS and also changes in local service systems to enable a response to every child reported at risk of significant harm.

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The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It is good that you are doing some sort of modelling by the sounds of it. If you could provide evidence of what the modelling is that would be helpful.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Sure.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What criterion forms the department's allocation of caseworkers family support resources, including where caseworkers are placed?

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is very operational. I will ask the secretary to answer.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: We have a resource allocation model that attempts to do that with the base of evidence. I might invite my colleague Simone Walker to answer.

Ms WALKER: Some of the detail that sits behind the resource allocation model takes into account risk of significant harm reports in certain areas and numbers of children in out-of-home care. It also takes account of the number of children who have an Aboriginal background. We try to expand the elements of that model to make it more sophisticated, and we do that on a two-year basis.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Have we closed the gap of what significant harm looks like? For instance, we took evidence in our inquiry that there is a benchmark of what that is and then there is a principal response to it. You make a phone call and they say, "No, you are not meeting the benchmark." Have we closed the gap in the discrepancy of what significant harm looks like through the agencies and reporting criteria?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: It is true that roughly half of all reports received at the Child Protection Helpline do not clear the statutory threshold. That is because mandatory reports, which comprise 70 per cent or 80 per cent of all reports, are making wrong judgements about what needs to go through. We have been working with child wellbeing units in the major mandatory reporting agencies—particularly health, education and police—to make better use of the mandatory reporter guide, which is an actuarially informed tool that helps people form a view based on the evidence and information they have about whether something is appropriate as a statutory response or can and should be a response from a local service.

It has proved to be a pretty slow process to make that change, and I think with 20/20 hindsight if you create something called a "helpline" and point everybody at it that is where they go. There is a large cultural element involved in this and people want to share their anxiety about something concerning they know about a child or family. We really need to reorientate the entire system so that people better understand the effective resources that are available in and around schools and healthcare facilities and in the community to provide a service earlier.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Maybe it is not being fed from the principal situation where lack of reporting is going to cost them greatly if they have got it wrong?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: There is a concern among mandatory reporters that if they do not report it, they are a mandatory reporter and they have failed in their duty legally and, arguably, morally.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: They would rather over-report than under-report?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Observations around the world would say that is often the case in response to a mandatory reporting framework. It has many, many virtues but that is a feature that has to be managed.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I want to come back to the out-of-home care. Minister, are you aware of reviewed evidence from oversea jurisdictions about the successes of extending care to 21 years of age in terms of reducing homelessness and improved participation in education and training and reduced costs to governments in terms of health and corrections outcomes?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Our own evidence suggests that if we can continue to support young people that their outcomes, their lives are better. We do quite a lot of work in this area now, and I will ask Ms Mulkerin to comment further.

Ms MULKERIN: As the Minister has outlined, in the recent recommissioning and recontracting of our out-of-home care contracts to the new Permanency Support Program, one of the areas that we have specifically funded non-government providers for is to focus on leaving care arrangements. That is reflective of the research and evidence that you have called out. We know that young people who have spent time in out-of-home care often have broken relationships with their own families and have often had broken educational experiences and need

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extra support. That is exactly what we are calling out in our Permanency Support contracts. We have called that out for the NGOs as one thing that we specifically fund and that we are requiring them to pay more attention to.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Thank you. Minister, how much funding is currently allocated to the Domestic Violence Line? I will ask a few questions and you can maybe refer to all of them. How many domestic violence calls were made during the 2017-18 period? How many of those calls were referred to the NSW Police Force? How many of the calls relate to repeat offenders? How many of the cases required emergency accommodation? How many of these people were turned away from emergency accommodation due to shortages in accommodation?

Ms PRU GOWARD: There are a number of questions there.

Ms MULKERIN: We might have to give some of the detail on notice.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am happy with that. The obvious question is: How much funding is currently allocated? Is it more or less than the previous year?

Ms PRU GOWARD: To specialist homelessness services?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: To the Domestic Violence Line.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Certainly no less and probably more by the value only of indexation.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That is fine. How many calls were received by the Domestic Violence Line during the 2017-18 period?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I would need to confirm that.

Ms NORTON: I do not have the exact figure but the figure is available on the FACS website. There is a DV dashboard on the FACS website that has all of that data.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I do not have a dashboard in front of me. I was hoping the department officers in front of me might have that figure.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is a public dashboard.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: If you could get that for the Committee it would be helpful. Maybe you could go online on an iPhone and get the information while we are here. How many of the calls were referred to the NSW Police Force?

Ms PRU GOWARD: If it is an incidence of domestic violence—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Yes, that is what we are talking about, the Domestic Violence Line.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Obviously we would refer that to the NSW Police Force. Of course, they can also ring the NSW Police directly.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Yes, I understand that. Does the department follow the statistics and evaluate the effectiveness of the Domestic Violence Line, what is coming through and how it is working, in order to improve policy outcomes?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Those are good questions. I will ask—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: They are numerical and I understand that question might put you in a position. I am not after the direct number but I would like to know if it is 1,000 or 2,000, whether it is 100 being referred to the NSW Police and how many repeat offenders there were.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think we can be comforted by the fact that we have actually grown the number of women shelters, for example. There are now 82 women's community shelters—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It is great that we have more shelters but, with all due respect, how many people were turned away from emergency accommodation due to shortages?

Ms PRU GOWARD: A lot of shelters do not operate 24/7, so they are referred to emergency accommodation. That has been the longstanding practice. Indeed, we now have supported temporary accommodation. That is a new program for us—

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I think Mr Vevers and Ms Mulkerin might have a response.

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Ms PRU GOWARD: That is giving people the sort of support that stops them leaving the hotel in the morning—

The CHAIR: We will move to the Opposition for questions.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I will come back to it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I want to come back to antisocial behaviour in social housing. Minister, from February 2016 to December 2017, 6,755 incidents of antisocial behaviour were recorded in public housing tenancies. Of those, 4,028 had no recorded outcome. I am quoting from the Auditor-General's report. These are remarkably large figures when you say that every tenant should be happy that this policy is now in place.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Ninety per cent of tenants say they are, according to our survey. Obviously some of those reports are not able to be substantiated but I will ask the secretary to—

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I will invite Mr Vevers who is into the detail of this to respond.

Mr VEVERS: Those cases were investigated and concluded but some of our staff failed to complete an administrative step. We explained this to the Audit Office and you will find that the Auditor-General's report outlines that and outlines the fact that those cases were closed and dealt with. So it is incorrect to say there was no outcome for those cases.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Perhaps you could provide on notice where that was clarified. Minister, I want to come back to you and talk about specific examples in Western Sydney. There was a tenant living in Rooty Hill who contacted the Department of Housing and Mount Druitt Police on numerous occasions regarding their neighbours. The tenant next door has thrown bags of human faeces over the fence when their toilet was blocked, they have dumped rubbish in their driveway and across the footpath and has vandalised neighbouring property. This is a prime example—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Of why this should have been done years ago.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —of your policy failing; it is failing.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is why we should have done this years ago instead of treating public housing tenants like people who just have to put up with that sort of behaviour.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, that is the exact attitude from your department when people are living with bags of human faeces being thrown over the fence.

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, that is not the attitude of the department. That is what you put up with when you were in government.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, you have been in power for eight long years and you have been the Minister for five years and this is what people in Western Sydney are being forced to live with.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, and you should say "thank you" because we have got an antisocial behaviour policy.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: The last three quasi-questions from the Hon. Courtney Houssos were in fact bland statements seeking to elicit some sort of reaction from the Minister. The Minister probably should not have reacted, but could we please keep to questions.

The CHAIR: Yes, a question followed by an answer is the best way to proceed.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will move on. Minister, I would like to draw your attention to a tenant living in Mount Druitt. Jane suspects her neighbour is dealing drugs; there is excessive noise and lots of visitors at odd hours. She has a 13-year-old son who has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and anxiety. The son suffers from sleepless nights, which is understandably affecting his schooling. Police attend frequently to their property. Police event numbers have been given to Housing NSW at Mount Druitt, and this issue has been going on since December 2017. This is the crucial part, Minister: Eight out of the 12 residents in the complex have also written to the department and there has been no action. What does it take to get a strike under your antisocial policy?

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is pretty easy to be virtuous in opposition. I will ask Mr Coutts-Trotter if he can explain to you how we do respond.

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Mr Coutts-Trotter: I will refer the question to my colleague Paul Vevers.

Mr VEVERS: Severe illegal behaviour is something we always take up, and I would like to get the details of that case to check what has happened. The Auditor-General's report does point out that there has been something like a 50 per cent increase in the number of cases that we have taken up in relation to severe illegal behaviour. At the beginning of that report it is stated that FACS manages illegal behaviour efficiently and effectively.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, are you concerned that eight out of the 12 residents in a complex in Western Sydney have been offered no support?

Ms PRU GOWARD: That is why we would all like the details of that case, so that I can follow it up, of course.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We certainly will be, but this is yet another example. I have just provided three clear examples that your policy is not working. Antisocial behaviour is rife across Western Sydney.

Ms PRU GOWARD: And your question is?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My question is: Are you not concerned by these examples?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Of course, I am. I have already said that, and that is why we will follow up each of them. When you give me the details, we will do exactly that.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Minister, will your Government increase paid domestic violence leave for public sector workers from five days to 10 days per year?

The CHAIR: That is one question that is definitely for the Minister.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, it is. I personally strongly would support initiatives that enable workforce participation as well as ensuring access to appropriate leave. That is why we have the Ministers' corporate leadership group to see what we can do with the corporate sector to tackle—

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: My specific question is about the five days leave that is now paid. Will you increase that to 10 days paid leave for public sector workers?

Ms PRU GOWARD: The surveys that we have done, in the private sector at least, show that the take-up of domestic violence leave, paid or unpaid, is very low, which was mirrored in the Workplace Gender Equality Agency last year. I met with the unions in New South Wales earlier this year to discuss their proposal on paid domestic violence leave. It is my understanding that the Fair Work Commission decision that it be an unpaid leave entitlement would apply to all employees including casuals, and will be available in full to part-time and casual employees, and that it will not be prorated. The commission will look at the issue of family and domestic violence leave again in three years, including whether that provision should become paid leave. As you would know, the commission rejected the ACTU's claim for 10 days leave. Our employees in FACS are entitled to utilise other paid leave arrangements as well as an additional five days of special leave. Flexible working arrangements are always available for FACS employees.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I understand that. My question is: At the moment public sector workers are entitled to five days paid leave; will you increase that to 10 days?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Are you referring to special leave?

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Yes.

Ms PRU GOWARD: They are entitled to five days of special leave. Until the case is made that we need to expand that, I would want to take that decision on the advice of my department and my other ministerial colleagues.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: So the answer is that no, you do not have any plans to increase that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I would like to consider that, but it would have to be an all-of-government position.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Minister, you were asked some questions about this in last year's estimates, and the Treasurer was also asked in his capacity as industrial relations Minister last year. He said you were looking specifically at this issue. You have had 12 months, but are you still looking at that issue?

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Ms PRU GOWARD: As I said, we have an additional five days of special leave and we have flexible working arrangements that are available. The uptake is slow across the corporate sector, and employees are entitled to utilise other paid leave arrangements.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Turning to the private sector, uptake is low largely because private sector employees do not have the right to paid leave for this purpose. Under the Fair Work Act, the States are left with the responsibility of providing leave for victims of crime. Do you have any plans to ensure that all employees in New South Wales, including in the private sector, have access to paid leave for reasons of domestic violence?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Would you allow me to take that up with my colleague the Attorney General?

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Of course.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My questions relate to WDVCS, the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services. What is the current status of the tender?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As you know, it is a fantastic service that provides a critical role in assisting victims to be informed and supported. I think it is a wonderful organisation. Legal Aid, through the WDVCS, the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program, actually manages WDVCS. FACS, through Women NSW provides funding to Legal Aid for both WDVCS and the local coordination points, the LCPs, and the Safety Action Meeting Coordinator, which is part of Safer Pathway. I am advised that Legal Aid has had to revise the boundaries of WDVCS, its contracts and funding allocations and policies, in light of recent changes to Police Force boundaries and combined areas.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I will stop you there. I am informed that that means that there will be a reduced number of areas. Is that correct?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I understand that there have been changes to the boundaries and that Legal Aid will have to work out how that should be reflected in WDVCS boundaries. I understand—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But the flow-on effect is that they will have to be doing more with less. Is that not correct?

Ms PRU GOWARD: The same number of people will be supported, because you have the same number of people. I am advised Legal Aid is conducting an open tender to select service providers for funding from 1 November this year. I would invite department representatives to add to my answer.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: To clarify, will there be the same number of workers? Even though there will be a reduction in the number of areas from 29 to 26, there will be the same number?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will ask Mr Coutts-Trotter to answer you, but the WDVCS contract is managed by Legal Aid, and you would have to ask Legal Aid what it is going to do about the boundaries issue.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Just to confirm that, it is their operational responsibility, not ours. We provide funding from the Government's Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy, but operational decisions about boundaries and about the conduct of the tender and procurement are responsibilities for Legal Aid.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Let me put on the record that I too think it is an excellent service, but I want to get to the bottom of what is happening with the tender. This is obviously funded by FACS, although the program is managed by Legal Aid. Do you put a requirement for a certain number of staff or is it totally within the purview of Legal Aid?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: No, it is Legal Aid's decision, not ours.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am told that, as a result of these changes, there might be reductions on the North Coast, in Western, far South Coast and South Coast resulting in a reduction in full-time equivalent staff. Is that totally a matter for Legal Aid. That is not something that FACS would find concerning?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: No.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: This is a question for the Minister: A reduction in full-time equivalent staff is not something that you would find concerning?

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is a hypothetical question at this point. I will get back to you with some further information.

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, Minister. I am informed that, as a result of the tender, this is going to occur. We are going to see a reduction—in some cases, by half—on the North Coast of full-time equivalent staff.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I will have to take that on notice because it is not my understanding and I will make sure I give you the right answer.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I would be interested to know if there is going to be a reduction in full-time equivalent staff across the 29 current areas or the 26 proposed areas and what those reductions will be.

Ms MULKERIN: I think it is fair to say that our colleagues in Legal Aid are in a tender process. Neither they nor us will know at this point what the actual impact on the number of staff will be until the tender is completed. In relation to specific staffing—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, this is a question for you. This is a service that is currently being operated. You have made the decision to tender out for a new provider for this particular policy.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Legal Aid has done that, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You have not had any conversations with Legal Aid about whether this will result in a reduction of services? You are not concerned by that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I have discussions with many people. I cannot recall any discussion specifically about this, but I am happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: You recall the Tune report?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Absolutely.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: You recall there was a bit of a controversy in the upper House this year about whether the House could compel the Executive Government to produce it?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Is it not fantastic that it was released and it has— ?

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Absolutely, and not before time.

Ms PRU GOWARD: We have instituted most of its recommendations.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What a change of tune.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: At the time when the Government was claiming this document was protected by Cabinet confidentiality, you offered to show or provide a copy of that report to Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile . On whose authority did you make that offer?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile's account of that conversation is substantially accurate and I support that account

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: But at the time, your Government was claiming this was a confidential Cabinet document protected by the doctrine of collective Cabinet solidarity and could not be produced to any person.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: He has always been an honorary member of the Cabinet.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: You offered to show it to one member of the upper House at a time when the Government was trying to resist its production to the House more generally. Why did you take that course of action?

Ms PRU GOWARD: He has always shown a very genuine interest in child protection. Of course, I would have needed to have cleared that with my Cabinet colleagues.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile's account of that conversation did not carry that caveat. He said you offered him a copy or to show him a copy.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, and absolutely I would have needed to have cleared that with Cabinet.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: That was a contravention of the Cabinet doctrine on your part, was it not?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Not if I have cleared it with Cabinet.

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The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: There is no indication in Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile's account that you placed that caveat on the offer; simply that you offered to give him a copy or show it to him.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think it is obvious that that is what would need to happen. But I think the wonderful thing about the Tune report when it was released—and if you recall, a summary of the findings was released in 2016 as well as the report—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Our time is about to run out. I want to ask you a follow-up question on that.

Ms PRU GOWARD: The wonderful thing about the Tune report is that we have actually exceeded the expectations of the Tune report.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is debatable.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You said you offered it to Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile because he had always been concerned about the provision of caseworkers and the care of our most vulnerable children. Did you offer to show this report to any other member of the crossbench at that time?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I cannot recall, actually.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Did you offer to show it to any of your colleagues?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I cannot recall.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You cannot recall?

Ms PRU GOWARD: To be honest, I cannot recall.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: This was a highly contested issue in the upper House.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I did not get the offer, Ms Houssos, if that is what you are fishing for.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Did you offer it to your Liberal colleague Mr Mason-Cox? [*Time expired.*]

Ms PRU GOWARD: I honestly cannot recall.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You cannot recall?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is a broad definition of "crossbench".

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I called him her Liberal colleague.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, during the break I checked the dashboard and I saw that as at 30 June 2017 there were 18,780 children in out-of-home care.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes. I am sorry we did not have that number.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But I thought the secretary may have had preliminary figures for the end of the most recent financial year.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What is the figure?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I hesitate to be inconsistent in releasing preliminary as opposed to assured data so I will not give you an exact number. But it looks to be a reduction of slightly more than 2 per cent of the population of children in care. So we have got—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Why are you doing that to me? Why are you making it 2 per cent? Can you just say it is about 18,200 or so? Is that right, or 18,300?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Total population. But it has come down on the year before.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The preliminary figures are still above 18,000?

Mr Coutts-Trotter: From memory, yes.

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, in the 2016-2017 financial year there were 129 adoptions, which is just over 60 per cent—0.6 of 1 per cent. In the most recent financial year, there were 140 adoptions, which is about 0.75 of 1 per cent of the children in out-of-home care. Why are you giving such prominence to adoption and resourcing it both with your political statements and with the resources of the department when it will never be anything more than a boutique part of the child protection system?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Because it is really all about permanency. Obviously the ideal solution for children at risk of harm or abuse is to restore them to their parents or, indeed, to prevent them from being removed, so we have an enormous investment in that. We have evidence-based programs—Multisystemic Therapy [MST] and Functional Family Therapy [FFT]—wonderful therapeutic programs that I think are already showing that they can make a huge difference to parents who struggle. When that is not possible—and I want to be able to look those parents in the eye and say, "We have worked as hard as we can with you and you have worked as hard as you can, but we feel that the child is still not safe."—then, when the child needs to be removed, the child needs a permanent childhood. Foster care, as you know, is an option that for many children is a terrible one.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you aware of the critique from the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat in which Chief Executive Officer Tim Ireland said:

Adoption through the statutory child protection system will never be an acceptable or appropriate solution for Aboriginal children. Are you aware of that criticism? Why are you ignoring that criticism and continuing to focus on adoption, including the adoption of Aboriginal children?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Really, we are focusing on prevention and restoration. Unfortunately, a crisis system inevitably—the costs are in the crisis end of the system, but the focus is on preventing children going into care.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Again, when you go to the dashboard, when it comes to Aboriginal children you see that there has been a failure when it comes to re-establishing children with their parents. Some 38 per cent of children in care were Aboriginal in the dashboard figures, but only 28 per cent of children returned to their families were Aboriginal. You are failing to restore Aboriginal children to their families and that failure is part of the reason why they are being put forward for adoption.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Well, it is not failure, in the sense that we have obviously restored many.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I assume you are not going to challenge the data from your own dashboard: 38 per cent of the children in care were Aboriginal.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But only 28 per cent of children returned to their families were Aboriginal. That is a failure of Aboriginal families.

Ms PRU GOWARD: But it means that we have been able to return 28 per cent of children, and those 28 per cent were Aboriginal.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, only 28 per cent of the children returned were Aboriginal. Only a fraction of the Aboriginal children in care were returned.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Well, it is a very clear intent and determination by myself and the department.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is not played out in the figures.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Well, this is very early work. The MST and FFT programs are in their early stages. Earlier in my evidence, I told the Committee that there had been almost a 24 per cent reduction in the number of children coming into care, and 20 per cent for Aboriginal children.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I heard your earlier evidence, Minister.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I mean entries into care, of course.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes. Earlier this year, the department announced Adopt Change as one of the partners in the New South Wales carer tender—a \$2.3 million contract. Are you aware of the critique directed at you on that by AbSec—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —the peak Aboriginal child welfare—

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —non-government agencies and the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies [ACWA] and the Centre for Community Welfare Training [CCWT]?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, I am.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you aware that the chief executive officer of ACWA said this:

It is bitterly disappointing to see a Minister, who has usually been so measured and understanding of the complexities and sensitivities of this portfolio, reach such a low point.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you aware that they also said:

Adoption from care is just one small part of the solution, and is appropriate for only a limited number of children. To give it false prominence, as the My Forever Family program reflects, sends the wrong message to the community that out-of-home care is an easy pipeline to adoption.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do you believe out-of-home care is becoming an easy pipeline to adoption?

Ms PRU GOWARD: As you can see by the numbers, not at all.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But that is what you are aiming for, is it not? A greater number of children being adopted out of statutory home care?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I am aiming to reduce the number of children in care. That is what I want to see.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, the Tune report that you say you are implementing does not put adoption forward as a key focus. You are directing this contrary to the recommendations of the Tune report and contrary to the evidence that suggests adoption will be a significant part of the solution, are you not?

Ms PRU GOWARD: It will inevitably be a part, but it is not the whole part. The significant part of our work is really in prevention and restoration, but when that is not possible, is there anybody who believes that it is better for a child to go through 10, 20 foster carer families over the course of a childhood?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, that is a false equivalence to suggest that the answer is 10 or 20.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: No, but it is a practical reality, David.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You will get your chance if you want it.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You do not have the ability to wave a magic wand and change—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, that is a false equivalence, to suggest that the solution, particularly for Aboriginal children, is either they be focused in a dysfunctional system through 20 foster carers or they be adopted out.

Ms PRU GOWARD: But guardianship is—and we have of course used Family Finding, so 77 per cent of Aboriginal children in care are with Aboriginal families or Aboriginal carers

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, given the clear Opposition from the key stakeholder for Aboriginal care and protection, AbSec, will you commit to putting a hold on the adoption of Aboriginal children out of the statutory home care system?

Ms PRU GOWARD: AbSec and myself have discussed this many times. We disagree. It is not a policy that is pursued aggressively for Aboriginal children. It is, of course, open and the law allows it. There is an enormous amount of guardianship that is being encouraged for Aboriginal children. I think what is important is that we provide children with permanent and stable childhoods, including Aboriginal children.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, my time is extremely limited. Over the past three years there has been a substantial increase in the number of women coming into the prison system. Indeed, there are about

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1,000 women in jail now and 60 per cent of those women have dependent children. How many children have entered the FACS system as the result of their mum being put in prison? What programs have you got in place to address this?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I would like to answer that question, but before I do, David, Chair, I need to make a correction to the record. Can I do that without cutting into Mr Shoebridge's time?

The CHAIR: Is it related?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: You can do it on my time if you want.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is unrelated.

The CHAIR: Is it related to a question from Mr Shoebridge?

Ms PRU GOWARD: No.

The CHAIR: Complete that answer to the question of Mr Shoebridge, then you can make it and then we will cut to the Hon. Paul Green.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Feel free to do it—

Ms PRU GOWARD: In your time? Thank you. Yes, no, it is a very significant challenge, of course, and I will ask Michael Coutts-Trotter to describe for you the programs that we have in place.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: I will invite Simone Walker, who knows far more about this than me, to respond.

Ms WALKER: Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And you are not allowed to send it to Mr Hubby.

Ms WALKER: No, it does not get passed down the line further. It is important to say that the data is not easily extracted from the system—and you made a comment earlier about that—about the number of children who are born into care because of the incarceration of their parents. What is important to say is that just because a mother or a father is incarcerated, that does not automatically mean that the child is at risk of significant harm. With those children, what we are really keen to do is ensure that they stay with relatives and with kin wherever possible. If a child does need to come into care because of that reason, we support a number of programs, one being SHINE for Kids, that we fund through our targeted early intervention service. What that is is an early intervention service that really tries to reduce the negative impacts of incarceration.

The other piece of work that we do is with correctives, which is around Jacaranda Cottage, which is trying to ensure that children who can live with their mothers in minimum security do. Kids under six can do that and kids under 12 can stay during the school holidays, but we do the safety assessment to ensure that that is a safe environment for children to be in. What we really want to do is make sure that where it is safe to restore those children to their mums and their dads when they come out of jail, we would actively use our multisystemic therapy and our family functioning therapy services, and also our restoration services for that, knowing that those new services that we have, 50 per cent of those places are dedicated to Aboriginal children and their families. We are very keen to make sure that safe restoration is an option for those families. There is no sense of automatic out-of-home care.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: To the extent that you can get some data, can you provide that on notice? Of both restoration and numbers.

Ms WALKER: If I could take a further look at what we have got available, that would be great.

The CHAIR: Minister, would you like to make that comment?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Earlier in my evidence, in response to a question from Ms Houssos, I told the Committee that there had been an almost 24 per cent reduction in the number of children in care in 2016-17. I meant, of course, entries into care. I am sorry. There was a reduction of entries into care by almost 24 per cent. And the same number, the almost 20 per cent reduction in entries into care, applies to Aboriginal children.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I would like to come back to Mr Vevers, who was going to clarify the temporary accommodation issues.

Mr VEVERS: The Domestic Violence Line [DV Line] and Link2Home operate from the same building, and they have a protocol between them that if someone approaches the Domestic Violence Line and there is no

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specialist accommodation available for them, then Link2Home will find accommodation. We will not see somebody going without accommodation. And if it is not close to them, we have a method of getting them transported via taxi to that accommodation.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Ms Mulkerin, you look like you have a note there?

Ms MULKERIN: I do. I was looking up the data to answer your question about the DV line, if you would like me to answer that now.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Yes, if it is a quick answer.

Ms MULKERIN: I can make it quick. In 2016-17, the DV Line took 16,228 calls. I can direct you to the tableau that is on our website where you are able to cut the data in many different ways. In relation to your specific question about referrals to police, in 2016-17 there were 2,771.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Talking about 2016-17, 43,000 women were provided with Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service [WDVCAS] to support them through the criminal justice system. Can you indicate how many male victims were provided support under this service last year?

Ms PRU GOWARD: WDVCAS is only for women, but we do provide support for male victims if they ring the helpline.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I understand that. The question was how many?

Ms PRU GOWARD: WDVCAS does not—that is a women's domestic violence court support service.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Can you still indicate to me what the Government is doing to provide domestic violence court advocacy service for male victims to support them through the criminal justice system?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I would have to ask Michael Coutts-Trotter.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: In turn, I will ask Deirdre Mulkerin or Melinda Norton.

Ms NORTON: That support is provided through Victims Services. So I would have to take the question on notice for the exact number, but Victims Services provides that support.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: If I could get the numbers, that would be helpful. Minister, the last census in the City of Sydney shows the number of homeless people increased by 67 per cent. What is your take on that figure?

Ms PRU GOWARD: In the City of Sydney?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: In the City of Sydney. Is it correct or is it –

Ms PRU GOWARD: The street count, or do you mean the national census?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: The census, the last census. Sorry, I do not have any further reference to the number, but it is from the census. I was hoping you would have some good news on homelessness.

Ms PRU GOWARD: I think our rough sleeper assertive outreach program, which we began in Martin Place and is now throughout a number of city locations, has been a terrific initiative. I really congratulate the Department on really taking this on. I suppose it needs to be recorded that we have more than \$1 billion on homelessness services over the next four years.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Actually, if you can break that down—because that \$1 billion has been quoted quite a few times—is that new money or old money? Re-announcements?

Ms PRU GOWARD: The new funding is \$61 million. Obviously, a billion dollars is what we spend, but the new funding is \$20 million for homeless, social impact investment; \$10.6 million for sustaining tenancy supports; \$9.1 million for additional transitional accommodation, \$6.9 million for co-located homeless and health services; \$6.2 million to expand Staying Home Leaving Violence, which we are expanding to five new sites; \$4.7 million for universal risk screen and support to respond early to young people at risk of homelessness; and, as I said, \$3.8 million for assertive outreach to proactively support rough sleepers. We are investing \$280-odd million for homelessness initiatives, including \$202 million that goes to specialist homelessness services.

The homelessness in the inner city of Sydney is a complex issue. It requires a range of solutions to meet the needs of very complex and vulnerable people—chronic health issues, mental health, drug- and alcohol-related

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problems, as well as past trauma. We have worked with our homelessness partners for three years now, providing coordinated support and assistance with outreach patrols, pop-up housing offices and, since March last year, this intensive outreach in targeted inner-city locations. Family and Community Services teams attended Martin Place 49 times in 2017. We offered services, we offered accommodation and we were able to permanently house 156 people who were previously sleeping rough.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That was a great initiative, where you took the department to the people, not expecting the people to come to the department. Congratulations on that.

Ms PRU GOWARD: That was the great learning. After that, we started doing the same thing in Belmore Park, which as you know is adjacent to the railway station. We visited four times in August last year. Again, all the eligible people in Belmore Park were offered housing assistance. At Central Park we worked with Transport for NSW, police and Health nine times in mid-November last year to offer those services and accommodation. It has been wonderful. We have even been able to do it on trains.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I noted when I travelled to New York and looked at homelessness that once it reaches a certain temperature—below freezing, I think it was—basically the authorities cannot leave the homeless on the street, which virtually makes zero homelessness for one night. Have you looked at any initiatives where we could apply such strategies, given the mid-winter situations such as that?

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is across New South Wales. We see people sleeping on trains.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: But on our coldest nights.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, and I think that is one of the reasons we assertively encourage people to take hotel accommodation, to stop them being cold overnight. We have supported temporary emergency accommodation. What I am trying to do is encourage them to see that you do not just leave the hotel in the morning and check out and go back onto the street; that we can help with health problems, addictions and illness. That then enables us to work with the homeless to put them in permanent accommodation where they do not break a tenancy, but I will ask the secretary—

Mr Coutts-Trotter: We do—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I have got one more question within 20 seconds, sorry. I will take that other one on notice, Mr Coutts-Trotter; I would love to hear the answer.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Sure.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What is the Government doing to increase efforts of relocating the perpetrator, whilst the victim seeks treatment or goes to court, so victims and survivors of domestic violence can feel safer in their own homes and not resort to refuges or homelessness services?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Perpetrators of domestic violence?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Perpetrators.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Relocating them?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Yes, relocating them instead of the victims—who on most occasions, as you know, are women.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Staying Home Leaving Violence is a program where the victim, usually a woman, stays in the home and the perpetrator has to be relocated. If you would like the specifics of what we are able to do—

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Take it on notice, perhaps.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Yes, how it is going, because I know it was a great initiative that you had a couple of years ago that we have been working on. It would be interesting to follow how that progression is going.

Mr Coutts-Trotter: Indeed. "Very well" is the short answer.

The CHAIR: Very quickly before we go, Minister, have you been able to progress a matter that I believe has been raised with you by the member for *[EVIDENCE EXPUNGED BY RESOLUTION OF THE COMMITTEE ON 5 SEPTEMBER 2018]*

Ms PRU GOWARD: What was your question?

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The CHAIR: Have you been able to progress the matter?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I might need to give you that advice—of course there are whole confidentiality concerns there.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, I think we all have individual cases we will probably raise with you separately after this.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, very happy.

The CHAIR: Just let me finish. It has reached a crisis point. I wrote to you on 20 July seeking urgent attention. I have not even received a letter of acknowledgement. I am raising it now formally to see whether we can move it along. It is very urgent.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you Minister. Thank you, Mr Secretary, and all the officers who came along this afternoon. There have been several questions taken on notice. They will be prepared by the secretariat. The *Hansard* will be available tomorrow. Members will read the *Hansard* and there may well be additional questions that they will wish to place on notice. They will come through via the secretariat. If any liaising needs to be done or clarification about those questions, you are welcome to liaise with the secretariat. Thank you very much.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The case you raised, did it involve children in care at any point?

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yes, foster children.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am going to move a non-publication order for the names. The formal order I move is that there be no publication of the names mentioned in the question from the Chair to the Minister.

The CHAIR: That is fine, happy to do that.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate