

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 1 – PREMIER AND FINANCE

Thursday 6 September 2018

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

THE LEGISLATURE

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The Committee met at 12:00

MEMBERS

Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile (Chair)

The Hon. Wes Fang

The Hon. Scott Farlow

Mr Justin Field

The Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane

The Hon. Peter Primrose

The Hon. Natalie Ward

PRESENT

The Hon. John Ajaka, *President of the Legislative Council*

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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The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for the inquiry into Budget Estimates 2018-2019. Before I commence I acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I pay respect to the elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aborigines who may be present. I welcome President Ajaka and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Legislature.

Before we commence I will make some brief comments about the procedure 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 parliamentary 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 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 their evidence at the hearing, so I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they may make to the media or to others after completing their evidence as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take an action for defamation. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat.

There may be some questions that witnesses could only answer if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In these circumstances witnesses are advised that they can take the question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any messages from advisers or members' staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Committee secretariat. Mr President, 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 website tomorrow.

To aid the audibility of this hearing, I remind 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 have hearing difficulties. Finally, I ask everyone to turn off their mobile phones or turn them to silent for the duration of the hearing. All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Mr President, 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.

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JOHN GREGOR, Director, Financial Services, Department of Parliamentary Services, sworn and examined

MARK WEBB, Chief Executive, Department of Parliamentary Services, affirmed and examined

DAVID BLUNT, Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council, Department of the Legislative Council, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: The Committee has allocated time to the Opposition, The Greens and the Christian Democratic Party [CDP]—in that order. We will commence with questions from Opposition members.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Mr President, I go to the efficiency dividends, formerly 2.5 per cent and now 3 per cent. Can you tell us in a succinct and honest way how you intend to meet the 3 per cent efficiency dividends and what cuts to staffing will there be across the Department of Parliamentary Services [DPS], in particular, Hansard, Cafe Quorum, catering, security and cleaning? Staff are concerned about their positions and we would like a clear and honest position from you.

The PRESIDENT: My understanding is that the efficiency dividends were at 2 per cent and in the recent budget have increased to 3 per cent. As you would be aware, the efficiency dividends came in in the 2005-06 budget under then Treasurer Michael Costa. It has been a bit lower than 2 per cent on occasions. In the office of the President, my predecessors and I know that in 2005-06 when the efficiency dividends started there was wide latitude of where you could start to see savings. As each financial year has occurred and the cuts have occurred you get to a position—I am happy to say that we are at that position—where there is not much left for the savings. It is a difficult situation. The Department of Parliamentary Services, the Legislative Council [LC] as well as the Legislative Assembly [LA] have done considerable work in relation to the expected 2 per cent. I am happy to say for the record that there are difficulties in now finding the additional 1 per cent, to the 3 per cent.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Does that mean you are cutting staff? Is that what it means?

The PRESIDENT: I am not saying that at all and please do not take it as that. I will say first and foremost is that I am communicating with the Treasurer, the executive officers are also communicating with Treasury and we have submitted that we should remain at 2 per cent and not be subject to 3 per cent, and I am awaiting an outcome in relation to that.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Even at 2 per cent will there be cuts to staff?

The PRESIDENT: At this stage there have been no cuts to staff. I can give you good examples of where efficiencies have been found. I am well aware that you and the other Whips were concerned about the reduction in the library hours during sittings. The reality is that after consultation in 2015, when surveys were undertaken, it was clear that the usage of the library research team during late-hour Parliament sittings was very minimal, almost non-existent, and on that basis—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can I say, Mr President, there was no consultation this time.

The PRESIDENT: There was a survey undertaken in 2015. So quite a substantial amount of information was found in relation to that. I have the information here with me in that regard. That was the first thing. Secondly, one of the best forms of consultation is looking at actual usage. When one looks at the actual usage over a period of time, it was clearly noted that the vast majority of inquiries were very detailed research inquiries.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I do not mean to cut you off. I will ask you questions about the library but my question at this point is: Will there be any cuts to staff in Hansard, security or cleaning services? That is a clear question with regard to staffing.

The PRESIDENT: Let us take one at a time. Let us take Hansard. There is no cut in staff in Hansard.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Will there be cuts?

The PRESIDENT: No. There has been none. In fact, there has been an increase in staff in Hansard by hiring additional casual staff to assist because there were issues with the late sittings and the additional committee work that was occurring. We have hired two extra casual staff for Hansard and we are looking at hiring another two for Hansard.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Will those casual staff supplement or replace?

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The PRESIDENT: They will add on. No, they supplement. They are additional in relation to that. If you want to look in relation to it, in 2016 we had 25 staff in total, full-time, part-time and casual. In 2018 we have 26 and we are looking at hiring another two. If we want to look at the cleaners, you will find a similar situation with the cleaners. I can give you specifics in relation to that. Cleaning staff, there has been an increase in the total staff hours per day. If we were looking at 2013 the total staff hours per day was 140 hours; in 2018 it is 156 hours. We currently have 22 permanent cleaning staff. The number has been reduced from 24 permanent. The reason for that is that one of the staff members retired and took a redundancy and another staff member was promoted.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can I ask you the question in a different way? How many staff positions will not be filled when they fall vacant or are abolished?

The PRESIDENT: There is no indication of staff positions not being filled. There are indications, and it has occurred in the past, that sometimes when permanent staff leave the better approach is to replace them with casual staff. That has occurred in the past with the cleaners. In fact, sometimes additional staff are hired on a casual basis to meet those extra hours and extra workload.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: In dollar terms, how much are you expecting in cumulative savings from the cuts?

The PRESIDENT: That is a good question. I have that answer here for you, Mr Moselmane. We are looking at a situation—if I can give you this example—for the 2018-19 period. At 2 per cent the saving is \$686,000. At 3 per cent it is \$1,066,000. We have to find an additional \$380,000 for the 1 per cent. As I have indicated, that is difficult. DPS and the Legislative Council are looking at ways to achieve that—ways to do it. As I said to you, I am taking the issue to Treasury, to the Treasurer, and indicating that our department—this Parliament—should be given exemptions in relation to efficiency dividends. We are a very small department. We cannot be and should not be compared to the very large departments. As I said to you before, there is a very limited budget and we continue to find cuts. I intend to keep working on that.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Mr President, how long does it usually take to fill vacancies?

The PRESIDENT: Mr Moselmane, the recruitment procedures—I will get Mr Webb to give you more specific details—always operate in the most efficient and quickest manner. At times, as I said with Hansard, it is not just a matter of filling a vacancy—and Hansard is a good example. Finding qualified personnel for Hansard is not easy; it is actually difficult. One of the new methods that is being trialled at the moment is hiring casuals, in effect, as trainees, to train them so that by the time their training is completed we have a list of people who can be looked at from a full-time perspective. On occasions, we have had to go outside the jurisdiction to approach other Parliaments to be able—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Before I move on to other questions, Mr President, in summary, there are no cuts to positions in the foreseeable future in Hansard, Cafe Quorum, catering, security and cleaning? That is what I understood from you.

The PRESIDENT: Correct. You have raised catering for the first time. As you know, as full-time staff in catering have left, we have been looking at casuals to replace them. That has allowed us to also increase our efficiency dividends relating to casuals because of the fact that there are times during catering when there is a huge demand and we bring in more casuals. There are times during catering when there is a very low demand, in which case the permanent staff are here but we do not have to bring in casuals.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Good afternoon. Mr President. I refer to the recent contract to supply milk to Parliament. Where was the tender advertised and when?

The PRESIDENT: Thank you for that question. When it was noted that milk was not coming from New South Wales, immediate action was taken in relation to that. A tender process was commenced, work was done and a review obtained. Then we looked at three suppliers that we also engaged—Norco, Riverina and Peel Dairy. It was discovered, I believe, that Riverina was chosen because it would be able to supply us with 100 per cent of milk from New South Wales.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you. Where was the tender advertised?

The PRESIDENT: I will get Mr Webb to answer that question.

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Mr WEBB: The total value of the contract was such that an open tender was not required. We went to three suppliers in line with New South Wales Government procurement guidelines and got quotes from those three suppliers.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: What was the cost of the tender?

Mr WEBB: I do not have those figures with me at the moment. I will have to take that on notice.

The PRESIDENT: I understand, from memory, it is approximately \$25,000, give or take, but we will take it on notice and come back to you. It is either \$24,000 or \$25,000, or thereabouts.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: How long is the contract for?

Mr WEBB: It is not a fixed-term contract. We purchase milk on a week-to-week basis. These are the arrangements entered into: We engage with suppliers to ensure that they can meet the supplier requirements that we have so that they are able to produce as much milk as we need and deliver it here. But we do not enter into a fixed-term contract. We purchase the milk on a week-to-week basis.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: So there was no tender because you did not need to. You approached, or were approached by, three suppliers?

Mr WEBB: No, we approached three.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: How did you choose the three?

Mr WEBB: One of the primary characteristics we were looking at was the New South Wales sourcing of milk.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I understood that; that was a correct decision.

Mr WEBB: Yes. We looked across the State for producers who were based in New South Wales and using New South Wales farmers for their milk. The three that came up were three that we could gather information on that met that criteria and who, on first glance, seemed to have the right cost structures. Then we engaged with them in more detail.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Were there any that you chose not to look at? How many were excluded? You indicated that nothing was advertised about this.

Mr WEBB: That is right.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Who was excluded from your consideration?

Mr WEBB: I would have to take on notice the ones that we looked at that did not go through to the next stage. We were very open to look at any milk provider across New South Wales that could meet the supply.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: How could you be open when you did not advertise and no-one knew that there was no tender process?

The PRESIDENT: Mr Primrose, we are talking about a contract of approximately \$24,000. You also have to appreciate that there are costs involved in running a tender process and in trying to save time by bringing in New South Wales milk as soon as possible. You just could not justify the economics of a tender process and you could not justify the time lapse of bringing in a tender process.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Mr President, you mentioned the term "contract". Can I confirm whether there is a contract.

The PRESIDENT: From my perspective, the term "contract" means that if I have an agreement with someone to supply milk on a week-to-week basis, that is a contract for that week.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes, I understand under common law. Is there anything in writing?

Mr WEBB: A contract in writing?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes.

Mr WEBB: No, we do not have a contract in writing in that way.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: So there was no advertising. It sounds as though no-one knew, except for a couple of people who were approached, and correctly they were from Sydney. There is no tender document.

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There is no contract. We have no idea for how long—this is week to week. And there is nothing in writing about it, anyway. That is a really great way to run a system.

The PRESIDENT: Absolutely. We are talking about catering, which is no different from other major caterers—major restaurants and major function centres. We are talking about catering. Catering management has a responsibility to secure the best products at the best prices with priority being given to New South Wales. It is not a matter that is fixed in time or in term; it may vary from week to week. There might be a better acquisition of vegetables from one farm in New South Wales, one producer in New South Wales or one supplier in New South Wales that suddenly changes its entire pricing structure and we move to another way.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: So how did you find—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It is an agile system.

The PRESIDENT: We have an obligation to ensure that taxpayer funds are met in the best possible way. Something we omitted to do when the milk was coming from another State, we are under an obligation, I believe, to give New South Wales producers the first bite of the apple.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Absolutely, Mr President. How would you know when a better deal is available? How do you propose to do that?

The PRESIDENT: Mr Primrose, I can assure you that these are matters that the catering management, the catering staff, the chef and the chef's staff look at and consider. As I said to you before, it is not just price; it is quality, consistency and all those factors. We pride ourselves on running a major catering function, restaurant, cafe, centre in Sydney. We pride ourselves on doing it efficiently, providing the best quality at really good prices. That is what we are doing.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Essentially, if it is an important contract, it will be the vibe that will decide?

The PRESIDENT: No, Mr Primrose. I think that is really—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Is that what we are saying?

The PRESIDENT: No, Mr Primrose.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: There is nothing in writing. You have indicated that the chef will decide—

The PRESIDENT: No, Mr Primrose.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: —whether there is a better cost structure?

The PRESIDENT: I think it is very unfair for you to say that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is that a reflection on the chef? That is very rude.

The PRESIDENT: I think that is very unfair. We have extraordinary staff. I have spent much time with them. I meet with them, I talk with them and I see them. We all attend the functions, the restaurants and the cafes. We see the quality of the food and we see the great work that they do.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I have seen you in the cafe, Mr Primrose.

The PRESIDENT: I think you demean the team when you say it is just a vibe.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I am trying to find out who is going to make this decision.

The PRESIDENT: The decisions are made through the team. The decisions are made through the executive. We have an executive director who is responsible for catering. We have a chef who is responsible. We have a DPS head who is responsible. We have a team that does what it needs to do.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Who finally selected the contract that we have now, or the non-contract we have now? Who?

The PRESIDENT: Which product? Do you want me to go through product by product?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: At least it is New South Wales.

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The PRESIDENT: I am happy to go through product by product with you. I am happy to tell you about each and every one of them.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: No, Mr President. I have asked you about milk. Who on the team had the final say to select— ?

The PRESIDENT: When we discovered the issue with the milk I made an immediate phone call to Mark Webb. Mark Webb then dealt with the matter. I am happy for Mark Webb to go through step by step what occurred and how we got to solving the issue very quickly.

Mr WEBB: The head of the catering team and the head of operations both undertook the review. I would say in answer to one of your previous questions: We are constantly scanning the environment trying to find the best produce, the best New South Wales sourced food that we can find. If you go back many years, the catering area used to enter into fixed contracts, but that then allowed a fix contract to set pricing that, as the markets fluctuate, as you would experience yourself when you go the shop, the price of lamb can change quite dramatically on a month-by-month basis—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We should get "MilkWatch", like we have FuelWatch, Fuel Check.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Mr President, I have one minute so I will ask you one more quick question, if I can.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr Primrose.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I used to regularly come into the car park and see the cleaning machine being used. I have not seen it for a while. What is happening there? How is the car park floor going to be cleaned?

The PRESIDENT: Mr Webb?

Mr WEBB: We moved to cleaning the car park after hours so that we were not disturbing users of the car park. As you would imagine, it is a little hard to clean when there are a lot of cars in the car park, so that is why you wouldn't see it any more. The cleaning team has raised with us that the machine that we have been using is probably heading towards end of life, so we are—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Still working?

Mr WEBB: I believe so. I will take it on notice. If you know any different, please let me know.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes, I know different.

Mr WEBB: Right. So, we were looking at what our replacement options were for that piece of equipment.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Is your replacement option or is one of those options asking staff to clean the car park by hand?

Mr WEBB: The entire car park by hand?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes.

Mr WEBB: No. No, that would not be—sometimes we do spot cleans of the car park by hand, but not the entire car park.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can I use the last 20 seconds or so, Mr President, to ask a question about the facilities, particularly after-hours use? You are aware of this issue that we have discussed in terms of the fees, where the standard rate for the Jubilee Room, for example, after hours is \$700, where you might have two or three users and if they use it for three hours that is about \$2,100 each. There is an argument for the users to be able to split that \$2,100, make the facilities more usable and available for the public, and members in here.

The PRESIDENT: After hours incurs a number of expenses to us. I will try to be quick because I know it is the last question—air conditioning, lighting, cleaning and, in fact, security. For members it is \$350 per hour.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: It is \$500 if you book.

The PRESIDENT: No, for members it is \$350 an hour. For non-members, for corporate, it is \$500 an hour. That is why many of the corporates always want to try to get a member to sponsor a function. The cost to

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us is approximately \$500 an hour to the Parliament. So we take a bit of a loss on members and we kind of break even in relation to the corporate. I understand the argument that you have raised with me on a number of occasions. Madam Speaker and I have a discretion and on a number of occasions when members approach us in relation to two or three events being booked on the same night, one will seek a waiver, one will seek a reduction and we have the discretion to do that. DPS did not have a discretion to do that. They had to set a fee. Madam Speaker and I have determined that it is appropriate to give DPS a discretion because on occasions no-one was approaching us. The fee was being paid—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: So, people can now write to DPS instead of yourself?

The PRESIDENT: Can I indicate this: On occasions losses are made. On many occasions it will be one function only—member's function—so a loss is sustained; on others you will break even and if we have two, sometimes you will come a little bit ahead. But ultimately, if you balance it out, we fall behind.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Thank you, Mr President. I do not want to take any time off—

The PRESIDENT: And that is the reality of it. But I agree with you that we are looking at, when you have three, four, possibly five functions it seems unfair that you are charging everyone exactly the same fee.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Mr President, I would like to talk to you about plastic.

The PRESIDENT: I thought you would.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: It may not surprise you. I wrote to you and to Madam Speaker in June about the use, in particular, of single-use plastics in the Parliament and I appreciate that some changes have been made within catering to that effect. But I think you would agree we could do better. The community would become very aware of the impact of single-use plastics on our environment and, of course, of the alternatives that are there. I do not think that I have had a response to the letter, although I appreciate there have been some actions. But I would like to get an understanding if a stocktake has been done with regard to the use of single-use products within Parliament?

The PRESIDENT: Mr Field, can I assure you that a response is being prepared for you? I wanted to see further actions being taken, and I appreciated the fact that you brought it to my attention. Can I indicate to you that it has been made clear that parliamentary catering is 100 per cent committed to the removal of non-biodegradable and single-use plastic. In August this year, so we are talking very recently, Cafe Quorum commenced a major transformation with the removal of most plastic and non-biodegradable items. This transformation included the following: straws being replaced with paper straws; food packaging replaced with compostable plastic packaging; coffee cups replaced with non-wax paper cups; coffee lids replaced with compostable plastic lids; plates, birch or hard cardboard plates; cutlery, birch cutlery.

We are also engaging BioPak to provide compostable waste bins for a complete point-to-point recycling and environmental waste management system that sectorally sets a standard not seen before in this Parliament. We are trialling this on level 9 to ascertain effectiveness and usability. We are looking at further opportunities. Can I say to you, Mr Field, I am more than happy, in fact I request, that if you have other suggestions that you see that are not occurring, please bring them to my attention?

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Can I make one immediate suggestion? Can you guarantee at the next budget estimates we will have glasses on these tables?

The PRESIDENT: Can I tell you, I was reluctant to fill it up and pick it up, noting that you were sitting there when I saw it?

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Mr President, you walked straight into it.

The PRESIDENT: That has been well and truly observed, Mr Field, and you are 100 per cent correct.

Mr WEBB: In fact, we have commenced work to get in compostable plastic replacements for these cups. We are just working across the Parliament to get that happening as well.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I appreciate that. It does appear that you have become aware that non-biodegradable and even compostable bioplastics are not of themselves compostable without having a very specific composting arrangement at the other end.

The PRESIDENT: And that is why we are talking to—

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Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Can I just confirm that process and that contract that you are looking at of the full life cycle management of bioplastics, what that will involve? Because, as I understand it, there are very limited options for recycling of those sorts of products. Are you talking about a dedicated recovery process going to a dedicated resource recovery plant? If you could outline that a little bit more.

The PRESIDENT: Can I put simply to you: This is why we have engaged BioPak and we are speaking to BioPak? Because we thought: Let's go straight to the experts to tell us.

Mr WEBB: And you will notice in the next week specific BioPak bins going up around the Parliament. That is part of that end-to-end waste management. We are also putting out bins that will allow for cans and other things that can be captured by the Return and Earn scheme to also be returned directly back into a recycling space. The money that comes from that will be donated to a charitable cause, currently the drought relief charity. But, of course, as times change we will reconsider that as well into the future. I know it is against the tradition to mention the Legislative Assembly but Madam Speaker, in particular, that Return and Earn process, Madam Speaker has been a been a particular driver of that process happening.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I appreciate that. Can I raise one other specific item? As much as I enjoy seeing the Parliament branding itself in every possible way—it is a fantastic institution; it serves the public well—I do wonder whether or not we need those plastic stickers with the Parliament logo on the majority of the products sold within the cafe. Can I just ask whether or not they will continue to be used on the bioplastic alternatives?

The PRESIDENT: Can I take that on notice? It is a good point you raise. I will have a look at it. I had not thought of that before and this is the first time you have mentioned it. It is a good point to mention. We will look at it and I will take the question on notice.

Mr WEBB: I could add just a little to that.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Yes, please.

Mr WEBB: In the next week or so we are making some changes in Café Quorum that will allow us to display food without any packaging and have it delivered to people directly, which will obviously remove the use of those stickers for things that we build in-house. The catering team has raised with me the fact that the stickers do not meet the same standards that we have been applying elsewhere and we are looking to source alternatives for that kind of branding.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Wonderful. I would imagine that with the majority of these products, be it a single-use coffee cup or a plastic takeaway container, whether they are biodegradable, compostable or not, they make it to a member's office and within seconds are in the member's office bin?

Mr WEBB: Yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Changing behaviours in the public is hard; changing behaviours in Parliament seems harder sometimes. How will you communicate with members and staff about any new waste recovery process and how can we ensure that we are not going to see a lot of that resource simply ending up in landfill as a result of it going to members' office bins?

The PRESIDENT: Mr Field, you hit the nail on the head. We cannot do it on our own. We require all members to assist. We require staff to assist. I am always insistent that every light in my office is switched off the minute it is not being utilised. I would like to think that every single member would switch off every light in every room when it is not being utilised for the many obvious advantages and win-win that would occur in that respect. We will ensure that information is forwarded to all members when the bins arrive et cetera. We will continue to encourage members. We will continue to send out notices. At the end of the day, neither I nor my staff can be in every members' room grabbing every cup and making sure it goes into the right bin. But I am also very happy for you to continue to remind your colleagues about how wonderful it would be if these actions are taken. But we will do our very best.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I am sure you will have seen that some of them walk to the other side of the room when they see me coming and they are holding a takeaway coffee cup, Mr President.

The PRESIDENT: Can I indicate this: I am down at Cafe Quorum on a regular basis and I am really pleased to see that we have customers but, more importantly, I am very pleased to see that many in the long line are holding one of their own mugs. They have brought their mugs with them to simply refill and use. That is occurring more and more, according to the staff down there.

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Mr WEBB: If I could add to that, we are just about to take a shipment of reusable cups with environmentally friendly Parliament branding on those reusable cups. The head of Catering and I are currently investigating differential pricing so that if people bring their own cups they get a slightly cheaper coffee than if they get the takeaway cup. That is, in part, to drive exactly the kind of behavioural change that you are talking about. It is not enough to just provide the area but to provide incentives for people to behave in the way that we would all like to see happen.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: That was my next question. I understand that that alternative of compostable plastics is a useful one but ultimately we need to address the issue of plastic use because it is still consuming resources totally unnecessarily. We all have parliamentary-supplied mugs in our offices and there is very little stopping anyone from taking them down there. I would hope that the focus of these reforms, which I really value and appreciate—and I am sure the community does—does not stop at simply how do we replace one single-use product with another that is a little bit more environmentally friendly because ultimately this is largely wasteful use that is just not necessary. In talking about efficiency dividends, I would imagine there are some gains to be made here?

The PRESIDENT: Absolutely. As you can see, Mr Field, work is being undertaken; it is being looked at. It is not a matter that we have got closed eyes to. We are looking at more and more ways of being able to do this and continue to do this. Again, we look to organisations like BioPak to assist us with it. I am very proud of the team at DPS for the way they have handled this and in such a quick manner.

Mr WEBB: And I will be asking the cleaners to help us monitor how successful we are being in that. They should be able to give good intelligence about where things are being reused and where they are not.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr President. One of the concerns in the Christian Democratic Party relates to the appropriateness of the current allocation of staff workload et cetera for crossbench members of minor parties. We are suggesting up to three members of a party. Currently, as you know, members receive two staff but we are suggesting for that to be reviewed and increased to three staff.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: And we would like four, thanks.

The CHAIR: The Government has 23 Ministers, with, I understand, 209 staff covering 52 portfolios. The Christian Democratic Party has two members covering 26 portfolios each. Additional duties for our staff include legislation, committee assistance, phone calls, emails, social media et cetera and of course a great deal of lobbying with appointments because of the balance of power situation that the CDP has.

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

The CHAIR: Is there a way that you could make a recommendation to the Parliamentary Remuneration Tribunal [PRT] to allow the minor crossbench additional staff to deal with the additional workload within your budget?

The PRESIDENT: Thank you, Chair. As you have indicated, it really is a matter for the PRT. The PRT makes the determination. When the PRT makes the determination, we, the Presiding Officers, then adhere to that determination. A recent example of that would be the lower House members of course had what would be classified as a staff of 2.4. Submissions were made to the PRT by the lower House members and the PRT approved it to go to three full-time members. Once that occurred, that resulted in two things. Of course, additional funding had to be obtained from Treasury to meet those costs and that was provided by Treasury.

But the second implication, which does not affect them the way it would affect us is of course you need the space for the additional staff. Most of the lower House members, through their electoral offices, have sufficient space because they were already employing 2.4, so they were easily able to go to three. We would have a serious problem in finding the additional space here. Having said that, it really is a matter for the crossbenchers to put their submissions and arguments to the PRT and then when Madam Speaker and I meet with the PRT it is canvassed and we put our views. I am not aware since I have been President that we have ever gone against any submission that has been put by staff but it does not mean that we are successful. The PRT will have the final say on it. I would strongly recommend that if the crossbenchers believe this is what is required, then they should put forward a submission to the PRT for the next determination.

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The CHAIR: I know the pressures of space. You have made extensions and so on for your Legislative Council staff. I often wonder as to whether there is any plan in the future to transfer some of the public library, the Mitchell Library, to Parliament and the Mitchell Library or the library could be shifted to another building—

The PRESIDENT: That would not be a decision that the Presiding Officers could make. That would clearly be a matter for the government of the day to determine if anything—

The CHAIR: I mean a recommendation by you to the Government?

The PRESIDENT: I have not thought of it in that respect. I know—and forgive me if I get dates wrong—there was a time, I believe, when Greg Pearce was the finance Minister that attention or detail was looked at in relation to adding to this Parliament and moving Ministers to this Parliament to space next-door or behind but the cost just could not be justified in relation to that so that did not occur. We are still trying to secure sufficient funding just to continue to meet the renovations of this building that we need to meet. That is my priority at the moment. That is the fight that I have with Treasury: getting sufficient funds and replacing membranes and other aspects, occupational health and safety matters when it comes to mould and other aspects in the air-conditioning where quite a bit of work has been done. I am happy to look at the suggestion, as you have indicated, and take it on notice.

The CHAIR: The members are happy with the recent upgrade of the computer operating systems to Windows 10. However, now that it has been installed on old hard drives which may not be entirely compatible, staff have experienced computer processing delays and claim that the old software was faster. Could you provide any information about the computer hardware upgrades that are needed in members' offices?

The PRESIDENT: I will get Mr Webb to do that. We have had similar issues with broadcasting where we replaced old with new, working with old. It is a work in progress, and great strides have been made recently. Mr Webb, could you address the specific aspect of members' computers?

Mr WEBB: You are quite right. We have recently been doing the upgrade to Windows 10, which is an excellent general upgrade, but we are finding that there are some computers that do not have the processing power to deal with the upgrade. In the lead-up to the upgrade, we worked with Microsoft to work out what specs a computer needed to run Windows 10 effectively, and we made sure that all the computers we were upgrading to had at least those specs or higher. We have found some instances, though, where a computer, even though it theoretically has the specifications to run Windows 10, seems to hit some problems. As those come up, we have been diagnosing that with the individual involved. Sometimes we can make some tweaks to how it is installed to make everything come good but, if it turns out that the computer continues to work too slowly, we will replace the computer with one that will deal with the speed necessary. I encourage any members—

The PRESIDENT: —or their staff.

Mr WEBB: —or their staff who are having those kinds of issues to please approach the IT Services team and we will go through that diagnosis. But ultimately, if we cannot fix the problem, a replacement of the computer.

The CHAIR: A problem has arisen in the recent Committee inquiries. As you know, we seek submissions—as many submissions as possible—from organisations and individuals. But in recent Committee inquiries, we seem to be getting a lot of survey forms that are being filled in. There is exactly the same wording on those forms. Some of the people submitting them are demanding that they be treated as an official submission. So when we do a report, instead of saying, "We've had a hundred submissions", we will say, "We've had a thousand submissions," and that sounds like there are a thousand organisations out there concerned about the new Sydney Maritime Park or whatever it may be.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Or the light rail or something like that.

The CHAIR: Could you investigate that—and also to eliminate spam emails, which are coming through to our mobile phones and my phone particularly? I am getting hundreds, which drain the power and the phone is going flat within one day, by lunchtime, because of what I think is the abuse of the members' accessibility.

The PRESIDENT: Chair, I am well aware of this problem. I am well aware that when I chaired a number of Committees, the number of times that it would occur. I know there are some precedents and I will have the Clerk confirm those in a moment, but ultimately it is for each and every Committee in its deliberative to determine how it deals with the submissions—whether it publishes a submission or does not publish a submission, whether it responds to or does not respond to, or whether it reports about it or does not report about it. I am aware

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of one occasion where, I think, a thousand identical letters were received with simply a name at the bottom that was different. We noted that we received a thousand identical letters, and we took that as one identical submission from a group of people. But again, each one determines it differently. The Clerk is well aware of the precedent and, like the Committee secretariat, is always able to assist in that area.

The CHAIR: Could you put in new guidelines—not instantly today, but review that—for the guidance of the Committee, Committee Chairman and Committee staff?

Mr BLUNT: Mr Chair, as Mr President just indicated, it is ultimately a decision for each Committee how it will deal with those sorts of approaches from the community when it receives large volumes of submissions or large volumes of correspondence in almost identical terms. This issue has been faced in other jurisdictions as well—in the Senate and the House of Representatives. We have had a number of high-profile inquiries in the past where Committees have resolved to process a small sample of those letters received as submissions and otherwise to simply record the volume recorded. The Committee staff, as you are well aware, are extremely hardworking and do a great job in supporting you and the other members with your Committee work. We are always working with them to try to ensure that the support is the most effective possible.

The PRESIDENT: I am not taking the question on notice because I think it has been answered, but we will have a discussion about it later as well and see if there are any ways of improving and assisting.

The CHAIR: If you can issue the guidelines because, as you said, the committees could decide that but that is where the controversy may occur: within the Committee itself.

The PRESIDENT: One of the things we have to be careful of, Chair—and you would know this very well—is that there can never be a perception that we are preventing members of the public from making a submission, in particular when you have called for submissions. There has to be a balancing act in that regard.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Thank you, President Ajaka. Thank you all for your attendance, particularly Mr David Blunt. I know you are very busy, as are other members. As you know, the Committee has resolved that answers to questions taken on notice be returned within 21 days. I am not sure whether we had many questions on notice.

The PRESIDENT: I think there are about three.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much.

The PRESIDENT: Chair, thank you. I thank all the Committee members and appreciate their time and the way that not only I but also the Clerk and the Department of Parliamentary Services were dealt with today.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.