

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 1 – PREMIER AND FINANCE

Tuesday 7 November 2023

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

THE LEGISLATURE

CORRECTED

The Committee met at 14:00.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham (Chair)

Ms Abigail Boyd
The Hon. Mark Buttigieg
The Hon. Wes Fang
The Hon. Peter Primrose
The Hon. Chris Rath
The Hon. Emily Suvaal

PRESENT

The Hon. Ben Franklin, *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**

The CHAIR: Welcome to the fifth hearing of the Committee's inquiry into budget estimates for the year 2023-2024. Firstly, I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders, past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Jeremy Buckingham and I am the Chair of the Committee. I welcome President Ben Franklin and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Legislature.

I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures. Witnesses, welcome and thank you for making the time to give evidence. All witnesses 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.

Mr DAVID BLUNT, Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council, Legislative Council, Parliament of New South Wales, sworn and examined

Mr MARK WEBB, Chief Executive Officer, Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliament of New South Wales, affirmed and examined

Ms JOCELYN WEBB, Director, Financial Services and Governance, Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliament of New South Wales, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: We will commence. The hearing will be conducted from two till five. There is going to be a break at 3.30 p.m. to 3.45 p.m. The allocation of time will be 45 minutes for the Opposition, then 45 minutes for the crossbench, then the break, 45 minutes for the Government and then an allocation in the last hour of 20, 20, 20. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Thank you for joining us today. Mr President, it's all very exciting, the renovation of Parliament House. I was wondering if you could provide an update on where those renovation and restoration works are at.

The PRESIDENT: I can, and it's very exciting indeed, Mr Rath. It's very important to start in this way and to say that there has been a little bit of commentary that the renovations have been predominantly done for aesthetic reasons. That is simply not the case. The aesthetics are wonderful and I think universally lauded, but the reason why these works had to happen was because we needed to address a range of issues, including work health safety, restoration and conservation of some of the structures, and accessibility. In fact, when we started the works, it became apparent to us and to the department that things were actually much worse than we had originally thought.

There was concrete cancer in a number of the pillars, for example. There were a number of structural defects. There was rotting woodwork. The outside facade was falling down. What we didn't want to do was to ensure that we had what is about to happen in the UK, which is that the Houses of Parliament are about to be shut for over a decade in order to address these works. The works had to be done. They are on time. They're very good. I will throw to Mark to provide a bit more detail. But I've looked at them in the slightly less than six months that I've been the President and I'm comfortable about both the scope of the works and the decisions that have been made in terms of a budgetary sense.

MARK WEBB: I just affirm that the work we've done has been able to deal with the issues that we were facing. You might recall in this forum, or some of you may recall in this forum, the air quality in the Chambers, and in particular in your Chamber, had got to the point where one of your colleagues had indicated that they were having medical issues as a result of the quality of air. I'm pleased to say that the work we've done, which has included changing the air conditioning and replacing the air conditioning completely, running it from a new location so we're getting fresher air coming in, and putting in place modern, up-to-date filtering processes to make sure the quality of the air coming through is in the process of working at the moment. I hope you have noticed a fresher and better environment that you're working in right now.

I would say, as you know, we had one intermediate deadline, which was ensuring that the Chambers were back up and running by the time the Parliament started sitting after the election. I'm pleased to say that we met that requirement. I wasn't anticipating the recall of Parliament that happened in December. We had demolished your Chambers by that point, and I thank everyone for your patience in sitting in the Macquarie Room for that recall. It was very much appreciated. I'm pleased to say the works were originally due to go through till 30 June 2024 when we originally put the timetable together. We are ahead of schedule. The facade will be finished in the first week or two of December. The Rum Hospital restoration will be completed by the Easter break in March/April. So we are ahead of schedule and within the \$22 million budget that we were given to deliver the works as well. Significant safety improvements: You can now walk out into the atriums with a degree of confidence that the glass won't fall out of a ceiling. I could not have provided that confidence previously.

The works have gone very well, and, as the President said, the primary purpose of it, which was to ensure the safety of the building and to ensure that the building could continue on into the future, those goals are being met. I did want to take the opportunity to thank the team that has been working on this, headed up by Rob Nielsen. He has done fantastic work sticking to these time frames and trying to minimise the impact. But I do acknowledge that there has been impact on members. We have had parts of the building that have been a construction zone for the last year or so, so I do acknowledge that impact and I assure you we've tried everything we can to try and minimise that as we move forward.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, particularly with the replacement of the metal ceilings in the tower block obviously and the tower block roof membrane, which has been an issue for all members, and we understand that and acknowledge that. But it was an important piece of work and we're through it now.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: The Members' Lounge is looking rather rustic these days. Any update you can provide on when that will be restored and back to normal.

The PRESIDENT: The first point that I'd make about that before throwing to Mark is that it has obviously been my intent to try and allow members access to the lounge as much as possible. I think there were only two sitting weeks in August that we had to close it down entirely for the works to continue. But as you rightly say, it's currently in a state of mild dishevelment where the bones are being put together for it to be even more magnificent than it originally was. Sorry, Mr Webb, but I'm going to make a public comment here, and that is that I would like it to be done and up and running before Parliament resumes next year. Now that it's on the *Hansard*, hopefully that means it's more likely to happen. Mark, over to you.

MARK WEBB: Apparently I'll have it done by the time Parliament sits. The timetable that we're working for the whole Rum Hospital is the end of March/early April as I said, but the President has made it clear that the Members' Lounge is a working room that everybody uses quite a lot through the sitting periods, so we are working to try and make sure it is as close to meeting the goal of the President as we possibly can by the time that you sit next year. Will there be a skirting board that needs to be painted? Possibly. But the room will be as up and running as we can make it by the time you come back in February.

The PRESIDENT: I think we can give the absolute guarantee that it definitely won't be shuttered.

MARK WEBB: Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: When will the *Founding of Australia* painting as well as the King George V and Queen Mary paintings be returned to the Parliament?

The PRESIDENT: My instinct would be once the works are completed because, with any artwork, you don't want there to be a risk of damage when there's actual serious structural refurbishments happening. My view is March, April. You may have a different view?

MARK WEBB: No, that's—

The PRESIDENT: But that was—basically when the works are done, the last thing to go back will be the artwork.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: But they will be returned?

The PRESIDENT: Absolutely.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Wonderful. I wanted to turn to probably more of a question for Mr Blunt. SO 52s—obviously there's been a quite a few this Parliament already and a lot throughout the last Parliament. I was wondering if you could provide an update on the progress of moving to electronic returns of SO 52s?

DAVID BLUNT: Yes, thanks very much, Mr Rath. I'd be delighted to give you an update about that project. Just while I'm talking about the possibility of electronic returns to order I might just ask the team to see if they can provide the latest up-to-date statistics on the number of SO 52s in this term of Parliament and a comparison to last year. In terms of e-returns, as part of the Parliament's Digital Parliament Applications project the Procedure Office has been working with both the Digital Transformation branch here at Parliament and the Cabinet Office—and prior to the Cabinet Office's existence, the Department of Premier and Cabinet—on the development of an e-returns system. That's a priority project for me and for our Procedure Office, as well as for the Cabinet Office.

There are obvious benefits both from the Parliament's point of view and from the Government's point of view. The system will provide Parliament and government agencies with an electronic system for the lodgement and receipt of returns to order. Documents will be able to be securely transferred to the Parliament through a new parliamentary portal that links to the Parliament's existing document storage databases. It's anticipated that e-returns will improve the accessibility of returns to order and provide significant administrative efficiencies, as I said, both for us and for government departments whilst ensuring file security and appropriate document oversight are maintained.

We've been tackling the project in three stages. Two of those stages are complete. In June 2022 stage three, the most complex stage, was put on hold pending the outcome of the Procedure Committee inquiry into the operation of Standing Order 52. That Procedure Committee inquiry reported in November last year and included four recommendations and two options in relation to next steps for the e-returns project. Since that report was

tabled the project teams here at Parliament and in the Cabinet Office have recommenced consultations to progress the requirements for that final stage, with a particular focus on security specifications for the system. We are determined to work through and ensure the highest security for documents returned before the project is finalised. That's the state of play at the moment.

In terms of statistics—thank you to the team—so far in the Fifty-Eighth Parliament there have been 20 orders for papers and a number of returns. With a number of those orders for papers the documents have been produced in various tranches but 20 orders for papers so far this term. Last year, 2021-22, there were 149 orders for papers. The year before, 2020-21, 164. There were 75 in 2019-20 and 14 in 2018-19, which brings it to a grand total of 456 orders for papers during the last term of Parliament.

The PRESIDENT: I do note as well that we have already had more orders for papers in this Parliament than we had in two of the previous seven full Parliaments in their entire term so things are progressing afoot.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: I wanted to turn now to committees. I was wondering about the budget of each committee. Does each committee have a limited budget? Who's responsible for managing that? What sort of oversight exists for the budget of each committee?

DAVID BLUNT: Yes, I'd be happy to answer that, Mr Rath. We have a somewhat unique set of administrative arrangements for the provision of support to committees here in the New South Wales Legislative Council and I think it is a system that works particularly well. I do think we're national leaders in this field. I think the quality of support that's provided to our committees is really second to none. There is a budget for committee operations across all of our committees and the committee secretariat supports all committees. At any point in time, officers in the committee office may be supporting not just one but often two different committees at the same time, often two different inquiries at once and sometimes more than that. We would not have been able to support the extraordinary workload of Legislative Council committees over recent years if we had operated on the basis of a siloed approach with a separate secretariat for each committee; that would require something like 15 separate secretariats and 15 separate budgets. So the budget is a whole and the secretariat operates as a whole.

It is important to note that the additional workload of committees throughout the last term of Parliament resulted in a number of budget bids being made to Treasury. Those budget bids were supported and the committee budget was supplemented and we were able to employ additional staff to support committees. If you'd like further information as to the exact numbers of staff members in the committee office and the exact dollar figures for the committee budget for this financial year, I'd be more than happy to provide that information on notice or later during the hearing today.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Yes, that would be good, on notice. I think what might be good—and I'm happy to put some questions on notice some supplementary questions for you—is the increase over time in the committee load for the Parliament—for the Legislative Council—in terms of the numbers of staff, the increase in budget, the increase in the number of committees and numbers of inquiries that have existed, maybe since 2010. I assume that if you looked at it over time you'd probably see quite a sharp increase in the number of inquiries in the amount of committee work over the last 12 or 13 years. It would be good to get some data on that so that we can look at that increase and we can all be mindful as well of the increased work on the very diligent committee staff that we work with. Anything that you can provide on that would be very helpful—on notice, of course.

DAVID BLUNT: Thank you.

The PRESIDENT: Sorry, I was just going to add three extra brief things. The first was to say, just as by way of anecdote, normally in the run-up to particularly the end of the parliamentary term the committee workload would actually come off in quite a significant way. That didn't happen this time. That was, I think, a point worthy of note. The second is that the budget increase that the Clerk spoke about—true—was important and secured but only secured for two years so that'll need to be secured again for 2024-25. We encourage all members of the Committee, particularly those who might have access to discussions with the Treasurer, to consider that favourably. The third is—I'm sure I would speak on behalf of all members of the Committee in saying—that we are deeply grateful and appreciative of all the work that committee staff do. They're an utterly invaluable resource and I just wanted to put that on the record.

MARK WEBB: If I could just briefly—it would be remiss of me not to mention the work of Hansard in supporting committees as well.

The PRESIDENT: Absolutely.

MARK WEBB: In 2011 Hansard did transcriptions for 186 hours of committee hearings. In 2022 it was 786 hours of committee hearings that they transcribed so that gives you a sense of the increase in not just the number of committees but the amount of public hearings and transcription that happens as a result of that.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Actually, that's a very good metric, Mr Webb, because, as I said before, the number of committees and the number of inquiries probably isn't as good a metric. The number of Hansard hours over time is a better metric because some inquiries might be short and sharp and others might drag on for the entire Parliament. So, if possible, any data around that over multiple years would probably be more helpful than the number of inquiries.

MARK WEBB: I can tell you that in 2011 it was 186 hours. In 2015 it was 297 hours; in 2019, 414 hours; in 2020, 652; in 2021, 748; and in 2022, 786. Obviously we just took snapshots of the 2011 through to 2019 period, but that gives you a sense of the growth.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: That is very, very helpful.

DAVID BLUNT: Mr Rath, could I add something? You no doubt recall that on a Friday afternoon each week I send a weekly update out to members with details of committee inquiries, tabled documents and orders for papers et cetera.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Yes, that's very helpful.

DAVID BLUNT: During the last Parliament the update each week on committee activity included a table which sought to identify quite handily the overall workload of Legislative Council committees and the capacity of the committee office to support those inquiries. There was a particular chart that showed when we were getting to peak loads or times well beyond those peak loads. We haven't published that table yet in this parliamentary term because up until now, with the additional budget that has been provided in recent years and the additional staffing, I worried that that chart might have simply encouraged members to establish more inquiries. However, very rapidly, that point has now been reached. So I will probably start to include that chart from now on, because we are at the point where, with each of our grade 9/10 principal council officers covering two inquiries, we've rapidly got to that peak point. So I would ask members to be mindful of the capacity of the secretariat when considering the establishment of any more inquiries at the moment, until such time as other inquiries have concluded.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Thanks, that would be very helpful.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, I'm going to start by asking if you could please outline the budget for your office, specifically, the total budget for the operation of your office, the total budget for your travel, the total catering budget for your office and the discretionary budget for your office. If you need to take those on notice, I'm happy to—

The PRESIDENT: I will take that on notice, but I am very happy to provide all that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Thank you very much. Mr President, can you outline how many times you've travelled overseas since your election to the role?

The PRESIDENT: I can. I have travelled overseas four times since my election to the role. Three of them were small. Two were very small. All were trips in July, were all paid for personally and were done as personal trips. The fourth, of course, was travelling to Ghana for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

The Hon. WES FANG: The four that were in July—

The PRESIDENT: The three that were in July.

The Hon. WES FANG: Sorry, the three that were in July—did one of those include visiting the office of the CPA in the UK?

The PRESIDENT: I did. Yes, I met with the Secretary-General and the Chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which was excellent. That allowed me to build a relationship already so that when we got to Ghana, I was already the vice-president. I then had to, in fact, chair the session in front of 600 or 700 delegates from around the world. It was terrific to have already established that rapport. As I say, there were no costs or burden at all to the Parliament. I paid for that entirely personally.

The Hon. WES FANG: That was your own personal cost.

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: In relation to the trip to Ghana, how many members of Parliament, LC staff and your office staff travelled to that conference?

The PRESIDENT: There were three delegates from the New South Wales Parliament—two official delegates in that they were selected by dint of being members of the New South Wales CPA, who were the Speaker, Greg Piper, and Liesl Tesch. I was an ex officio delegate already because I was, at that time, the

vice-president of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and then at the end of the conference in Ghana became the president. I was already an ex officio delegate. So there were three of us, plus the Clerk of the Parliaments, David Blunt. The Deputy Clerk—I want to say—of the Legislative Assembly, Carly Maxwell, also attended, as well as my chief of staff, Will Coates.

DAVID BLUNT: Yes.

The PRESIDENT: This was a really important trip because, as I'm sure you're aware, Mr Fang, next year we have the very exciting opportunity of hosting the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Sydney from 4 to 8 November at the International Convention Centre.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm going to cover off some questions about that in a little bit.

The PRESIDENT: I was just going to say it was very important that we all knew what the expectations were so that we could put on a great conference next year, which is why I was very pleased with the delegation we sent.

The Hon. WES FANG: Was the travel all booked by FCM, the travel partner of the Parliament, or was each arrangement made by each member?

The PRESIDENT: I don't know how it was booked, but it was not booked by me. It was booked by the Clerk's office, so I assume it was all done in accordance with parliamentary policies.

DAVID BLUNT: Yes, all the travel was booked by FCM and all subject to the usual approvals.

The Hon. WES FANG: Things like security and hotels were all considered, because obviously in Ghana there are some concerns around security? I am just making sure that staff and members of Parliament were all protected whilst we were over there.

The PRESIDENT: We were all in exactly the same hotel.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Blunt, your office organised all the travel and the airfares?

DAVID BLUNT: It was a joint exercise between my office and the office of the Clerk of the Assembly. My office organised the travel bookings for myself, Mr President and Mr President's chief of staff and the office of the Clerk of the Assembly for the Speaker, Ms Tesch and Ms Maxwell.

The Hon. WES FANG: Does everyone book economy tickets for that?

DAVID BLUNT: No. In accordance with established precedent and established parliamentary rules for travel of this nature, for a journey of that length—and, of course, West Africa is a long way from Sydney—we all travelled business class.

The Hon. WES FANG: Everybody travelled business class. Are you able to provide, on notice, the cost of the trip and the accommodation?

The PRESIDENT: Yes. We're very happy to. I can't give it to you right now, and the reason why is because the CPA actually provide a rebate for a portion of that trip and a portion of the costs. So what we'll do is we'll come back to you happily on notice and provide all that information.

The Hon. WES FANG: Were any upgrades offered on the trip?

The PRESIDENT: Not to me. I don't know about you, David.

DAVID BLUNT: Certainly not to me.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, I just thought I would check.

The PRESIDENT: If you know of someone I should be talking to, let me know.

The Hon. WES FANG: In relation to other travel, Mr President, can you outline how many official trips you've taken to rural, regional or remote New South Wales as the President?

The PRESIDENT: I can. Just give me a second.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm happy to exclude the ones from around the Byron area.

The PRESIDENT: I appreciate that. If you're excluding the Northern Rivers, including Lismore and Tweed as well, I went to Barwon on 8 and 9 September, which I actually funded myself. I'll confirm that, but I'm 99 per cent sure I funded that myself. I'll tell you if that's not the case. Otherwise, I funded it myself. Nonetheless, I met with a number of creatives and artists out in Broken Hill because, as part of the bicentenary next year, as

you know, we have a range of exhibitions in the Fountain Court, and I want to send a very strong message that this is the Parliament for all of New South Wales, not just for Sydney.

The Hon. WES FANG: Understood.

The PRESIDENT: With Broken Hill not only being an artist culture and having a lot of artists out there but also being the most remote city in New South Wales, in June next year—I think it is—we want to have an exhibition with Broken Hill artists, focusing on the landscape and the history of Broken Hill and so on. So that was that.

The Hon. WES FANG: How did you—continue the answer, if you wouldn't mind, Mr President, and then we'll go into some questions.

The PRESIDENT: I went to Dubbo, as I was invited to attend and speak at the World Ocean Day school 30x30 workshop, which was at, I want to say, St Johns College.

The Hon. WES FANG: I believe it was, yes.

The PRESIDENT: As a part of that, I caught up with the mayor, Mathew Dickerson, for a brief coffee. I think they are the only two, excluding the Northern Rivers, that I've done. But I will—

The Hon. WES FANG: That's my understanding as well.

The PRESIDENT: I'll come back to you if that's not the case.

The Hon. WES FANG: In relation to the trip to Barwon, that was for the Broken Heel Festival?

The PRESIDENT: Yes. It was for a number of things, but the Broken Heel Festival as well.

The Hon. WES FANG: Who invited you on that trip?

The PRESIDENT: I'd gone last year as Minister for the Arts, and Minister for Tourism. The organiser, Esther, who is amazing and does a fantastic job, was very enthusiastic about me coming back, so I did. It was terrific. Not only did I do that but there was a range of other things. We visited, obviously, as we talked about, a range of galleries, went out to Silverton, Mundi Mundi Plains and so on. But all of that was paid for by me.

The Hon. WES FANG: Did anyone travel with you?

The PRESIDENT: Yes. Members of my staff came as well, but they all paid for themselves as well.

The Hon. WES FANG: All your staff travelled with you, is that correct?

The PRESIDENT: Not all of them, no. Some of my staff came, but they all paid in a personal capacity.

The Hon. WES FANG: No worries at all.

The PRESIDENT: There was no budgetary impact.

The Hon. WES FANG: In relation to the Dubbo trip, who organised that speaking engagement?

The PRESIDENT: When I was Minister for Regional Youth I funded this regional set of programming for the World Ocean Day school workshops to send a message that it's not just people in coastal communities that need to care about the quality of our oceans; it's in fact everywhere in New South Wales.

The Hon. WES FANG: Understood.

The PRESIDENT: I think they've organised four or five different workshops. This was the first one. They were keen for me to come and speak because I funded it. They wanted me to come. Basically, they thought it was a nice thing to do. I was very happy to do that because, frankly, speaking to 200 schoolchildren about the importance of protecting the environment and the oceans I think is a good thing to do.

The Hon. WES FANG: Thank you, Mr President. I'm going to table this email, if you wouldn't mind. There are 10 copies there. I've got one to Chris and one to myself; there should be enough for the other members. Mr President, this is an email that you sent to National Party members earlier in the year addressing your election to the role. In it, you talk about significant positives for the NSW Nationals that would happen following your election to the role. Can you provide some insight as to what significant impacts and insights you've been able to provide to rural, regional and remote New South Wales since you've been elected?

The PRESIDENT: The first is, obviously, there are those two trips. There are also a number of trips I'm happy to go into for the Northern Rivers as well. I'm also, even before the end of the year, for example, visiting Orange to go to the conservatorium—they've invited me out to see the new Steinway piano that I helped to fund through Creative Capital when I was arts Minister—or, for example, down to Albury to see the opening of the

\$3.3 million fund of their new vaudeville theatre, which I'm very happy to do. Obviously that was again funded through my time as arts Minister. I'm happy to do those sorts of visits, is the first point.

The second point is that I think it's very important for the Parliament to be seen, as I said before, as the Parliament for New South Wales and not just the Parliament for Sydney. One of the first things I did when I came in and we discussed the plans for the bicentenary was talk about how this can be relevant for regional people. We have now built a plan of I think it's half-a-dozen different visits—don't hold me to that exact number; it could be five, it could be seven—to different regional areas where not only will there be a travelling exhibition but there'll be a range of other events organised that will celebrate the 200 years of the Legislative Council and, by its nature, representative democracy in Australia. There'll be engagements with schoolchildren, engagements with local communities and so on. Obviously the local members will be engaged in that. That will be a good thing.

The third point is that I think it's very important to ensure that regional people feel welcome within the Parliament, they know that it's their Parliament—

The Hon. WES FANG: Which is a lovely segue, actually, to the next question I'm about to ask.

The PRESIDENT: What I want to do—and have done, and will continue to do—is welcome as many regional people in whatever capacity I can into the Parliament. I've already done that. For example, I met with the Regional Youth Taskforce on 26 May in my dining room. We had a meeting and a discussion about the work that they'd done. I addressed secondary school captains from across New South Wales participating in the Secondary Schools Student Leadership Program at the end of June. I hosted Lismore school captains, Ballina school captains and Clarence school captains in my office, by dint of the fact that I'm from the North Coast, when they were here for their leadership session. I've attended the Myall Creek massacre memorial event in Parliament. I addressed and awarded the awards for the New South Wales Parli-Flicks award, which had students from Gloucester, for example. I welcomed Maitland school students into the Parliament and addressed them. I think it's those sorts of things where you bring people in. For example, Jamie Chaffey—as you would know, the chair of the Country Mayors Association—has come to visit me twice to talk about issues that are relevant to country mayors.

The Hon. WES FANG: Part of the question I was going to ask was can you outline some of the community representatives and organisations that you've brought in to Parliament. I guess the email specifies that you'll be looking to do this in a proactive manner. A lot of those visits that you've just indicated are people that are coming to Parliament that you've met subsequent to them being here. In your role as President, who have you proactively brought to the Parliament in order to have that rural, regional and remote voice heard here?

The PRESIDENT: I've gone through a whole range of different meetings that I've had. Clearly we're very excited about the bicentenary and what we're going to be able to organise in terms of bringing in regional and rural people for that and inviting them into the place. Obviously the Broken Hill art series is one of those things. But it's a work in process and I'll continue to do it.

The Hon. WES FANG: You referenced that you've got three members of the National Party employed in your office. Do you still have those members employed?

The PRESIDENT: I'm not sure that that's actually a relevant question to this hearing.

The Hon. WES FANG: I was curious as to whether there has been any movement in your office staff-wise.

The PRESIDENT: There was a staff member who was employed and, due to budgetary constraints—he was employed full-time for a couple of months and then was going to be employed part-time because he's at university, but because of budget restraints he wasn't able to continue. But I believe he's got another job and is happy in that job.

The Hon. WES FANG: Given that you've been overseas five times and we've—

The PRESIDENT: Four times.

The Hon. WES FANG: Four times. Apologies.

The PRESIDENT: And one, by the way, was to New Zealand for literally 36 hours.

The Hon. WES FANG: Fair enough. I appreciate the disclosure. Given that you've been overseas four times but we've effectively got, excluding the Northern Rivers stuff—you obviously live up there as well—two trips to rural and regional New South Wales for two events and you've got four overseas trips, can you understand there's some concern as to the lack of focus on rural, regional and remote New South Wales?

The PRESIDENT: No, I don't understand that. I'm happy to go through all of the trips that I've made to the North Coast as well, which is obviously the area where I've built up significant relationships and where

I have the trust of the communities up there. I have advocated on their behalf. The Byron Bay bowling club, for example, asked me to be their guest speaker at their 100th anniversary. For the reopening of the PCYC in Lismore after the flooding, they asked me to come to the official opening of that. Naturally, because of the time I've spent up there, I will spend a lot more time focusing on the North Coast. But you're quite right to say it, and I'm very conscious of the role that this has in terms of focusing on all of New South Wales. That's a priority of mine and one that I'll continue to enact.

The Hon. WES FANG: We will welcome you to southern New South Wales hopefully very soon.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, I'm actually going to Albury for the Flying Fruit Fly Circus in December.

The Hon. WES FANG: Excellent.

The PRESIDENT: I'm looking forward to that very much.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, I will turn now to some other issues. Do you support the Broderick review?

The PRESIDENT: Of course, yes. Hang on, I presume what you mean by that is, "Do you support implementing the recommendations from the Broderick review?"

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes. It was a very short—I'm trying to truncate my questions because—

The PRESIDENT: Yes, that's fine.

The Hon. WES FANG: —I was expecting to have more time.

The PRESIDENT: The short answer is yes, and I would hope all members of this Parliament do.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, you obviously understand that you, along with the Speaker, are effectively responsible for the implementation of the findings and recommendations of that review. Is that fair?

The PRESIDENT: No, it's not. We're responsible for the implementation of some of the recommendations. There are a range of different—obviously there is a whole broad gamut of recommendations. Some of them are relevant to political parties in terms of their application. Some of them are relevant to the Parliament as a whole, and so therefore looking at either updating policies or potentially having the Privileges Committee looking at particular issues. But, yes, I carry a significant burden of the responsibility as well, as does the Speaker.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, is it fair to say that security issues are constantly being reviewed in light of local and global events?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, that is fair. Of course. Mark might have some further information to add, but we receive regular updates about what the security status is. Sometimes there will be shifts in the number of special constables, for example, within the precinct, which will reflect the current status. Obviously, we've all been very focused on worldwide events and the potential impact that it might have on this place. That's why, for example, there was a memo sent to all members of the parliamentary precinct, I think in mid-August, discussing a range of security issues, and then sent again in mid-October, once obviously things started heating up again, in terms of ASIO advice and the protocols of what people should do in terms of protecting themselves and so on. But, in terms of specific issues, I would always encourage both members of Parliament and any members of the parliamentary community to raise any specific issues with the relevant channels.

The Hon. WES FANG: That segues nicely to my next question to Mr Webb. Mr Webb, it is your role that you would normally communicate a lot of those matters to members of Parliament and the staff within the precinct. Is that correct?

MARK WEBB: Yes, that is correct. If there's a specific risk, of course. For instance, if we've got word that a protest may be violent—that doesn't happen very often—but if it might pose a risk to people coming in and out of the building—

The Hon. WES FANG: Or even just access to the Parliament via a protest.

MARK WEBB: Yes, maybe you come through the back.

The Hon. WES FANG: You're very good at communicating that, and I thank you for that. Mr Webb, there was an unspecified security event that occurred within the President's office. How was this reported to you?

MARK WEBB: I would think I would let you talk to that specifically.

The Hon. WES FANG: Actually, I'm asking you, Mr Webb, as to how it was—

The PRESIDENT: I told him about it, is the short answer.

MARK WEBB: The information about that particular issue was communicated to me by the President. I don't have specifics in terms of dates and times et cetera here.

The Hon. WES FANG: Can you provide those on notice, by any chance?

MARK WEBB: Probably not, in that it was verbal. I don't have a record of it. I will, on notice, though, go back and check my records.

The Hon. WES FANG: You're actually covering off one part of the other question, which is was there a security review done, which was indicated in the correspondence that was provided to members after the event. Who did it and what documentation was generated as a result of the request? You're saying it was verbal only. Was there any documentation generated out of that review?

MARK WEBB: I haven't generated any documentation.

The Hon. WES FANG: At all?

MARK WEBB: No.

The Hon. WES FANG: Nothing about this matter?

MARK WEBB: No.

The Hon. WES FANG: Do you know if a security review was conducted and who conducted it?

MARK WEBB: I'm not aware of the details of any review that was done. I can take on notice whether I can find any records of that, but in this moment right now I'm not aware of the details of that.

The PRESIDENT: I think the easiest thing is to take it on notice.

The Hon. WES FANG: It seems interesting that the shutting down of a complete section of the Parliament on level seven has no documentation and everyone seems to be very vague on dates. It's slightly interesting. Was any counselling or any support offered in relation to this complaint? Obviously, you said it was verbal, Mr Webb, but surely that must have triggered some sort of protocol?

The PRESIDENT: I dealt with the issue at the time, and I am comfortable that the staff member in question received the support required and that the behaviour, due to the decisions that were taken, wouldn't be repeated.

The Hon. WES FANG: Did you document anything in your office in relation to this event?

The PRESIDENT: Obviously, I've sent out a range of emails about it, but I fulfilled all of the requirements that I was required to in terms of this particular issue.

The Hon. WES FANG: Was a formal complaint made at all, are you aware?

The PRESIDENT: To the ICO?

The Hon. WES FANG: Just in general. Was a formal complaint made to you?

The PRESIDENT: By the staff member?

The Hon. WES FANG: By the staff member or by you in relation to what occurred, because obviously there's a lot of—

The PRESIDENT: I appreciate the line of questioning. I don't think it's appropriate to go down this line. I do feel that—

The Hon. WES FANG: It will become apparent why it's appropriate later.

The PRESIDENT: Sure.

The CHAIR: Order!

The PRESIDENT: Let me just say what I think is important. When there are particular issues that happen, it's entirely within the remit of the person affected as to whether they lodge a formal complaint or take the issue through the formal process or not. I don't feel it is within either the remit of this Committee or, frankly, it's appropriate for me to discuss that particular individual's course of action.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, from my recall, you said that security conducted a security review. Do you know what was involved in that review?

The PRESIDENT: Obviously, we'll take that on notice. I don't have those details in front of me at the moment, but I certainly remember that there were members of the security division of the Parliament in the office providing us with advice about things that they recommended should happen. But I'm happy to take this line of questioning on notice.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Webb, is it usual that you would have members of the DPS security team providing advice to the President and not documenting anything?

MARK WEBB: The members of the security team are available to provide advice to any member on any security issue at any time. If it is something that has implications that go more broadly to the Parliament, it would be escalated to me. But we take the confidentiality and privacy of members very seriously, so it is possible for—

The Hon. WES FANG: So if there was a circumstance where you decided to lock out certain members of the Parliament—noting that LA members still had access to that corridor, it would appear, at the time but LC members did not—that would certainly generate some sort of paperwork trail, would it not?

The PRESIDENT: Can I just address that? There are a couple of elements there. The first is that if there were LA members having access—and LC members—that certainly wasn't intended. What was intended at the time was a very small area where my staff work, which was away from my office—that late at night those offices wouldn't then be automatically accessible by everybody, which is, frankly, the way that offices are on level 11. If people choose to leave their doors unlocked, that's fine, but people have the opportunity for that not to be the case. I wanted my staff to have the opportunity, particularly on late nights when there are sittings and it's isolated, to have the opportunity to feel that they were safe and secure. That was the only area. It's a very small area that literally consists of staff offices, not public parts of the building. As you will recall, Mr Fang, originally it was to be a broader area because I hadn't really thought through the ramifications about the bathroom. But, as soon as it was brought to my attention that members use that bathroom, we were able to find another alternative so they were able to come in through the other door.

The Hon. WES FANG: But it wasn't, Mr President, was it, because it was communicated that no access would be provided to those bathrooms at all to members?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, that's my point. I think at 1.26 in the afternoon we advised that wouldn't happen, but then between that time and then six o'clock that evening, people said, "Whoa, hang on. We use those bathrooms", and so, therefore, we changed that determination, because I wasn't aware of that before.

The Hon. WES FANG: But there was no communication to any of the members, was there, that there was a change to the security arrangements and there was going to be limited access to that area?

The PRESIDENT: Yes. That was the email at 1.26 on that day.

The Hon. WES FANG: But that was after the matters were raised by colleagues in the LC.

The PRESIDENT: No. We emailed all members of the Legislative Council letting them know what the new arrangements would be and then, obviously—

The Hon. WES FANG: I will come back to this a little bit later—

The PRESIDENT: Yes, sure.

The Hon. WES FANG: —because I'm running short of time, I suspect, and I'm not sure how much time I have left.

The CHAIR: None.

The Hon. WES FANG: How good is my internal radar? It's pretty good.

The CHAIR: I don't know about your radar, Mr Fang, but I do know that it's time for questions from Ms Boyd.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I feel compelled to say that I didn't have any idea that you could even go in your presidential area and the area of your staff and use the toilets.

The PRESIDENT: You are welcome any time, Ms Boyd.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I don't intend to, but my question is actually about toilets. We are in a very fortunate position that we finally have almost parity of men and women in the upper House, in terms of members. We, unfortunately, work in a precinct that has not caught up with the times. I've done a little bit of—probably too much—research when it comes to toilets on level 11 but, using Safe Work Australia's guidelines, it appears that

we have on level 11 sufficient toilet facilities for 205 men but for only 60 women, because of the way that the numbers of cubicles and urinals and things are set up for men versus women. Obviously, we don't have three times as many men on level 11 as we do women. Will you have a look at this and see if we can fix it, because the queues are getting ridiculous?

The PRESIDENT: Sure. Thank you for raising the issue. This is something that does get looked at from time to time. It's a fluid—it's a dynamic issue—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: It's fluid and dynamic.

The PRESIDENT: —that does need to be addressed. For example, you might remember with the gym and the change rooms, there was an inappropriate ratio of men's to women's facilities available, so that was flipped, and I think that's been a great outcome. Before I deal with the specifics of the question, can I thank you for asking me about all the toilets in the Parliament—that reflects your socially democratic nature—rather than just the one. We are very happy to address that, but my short answer is, of course, if there is an issue not only about toilets but about anything else in terms of the facilities available to members, particularly if there's a disparity between particular cohorts—males and females are an obvious place to start, but there may well be others, like people with children, people with disabilities and so forth. That is something that I am passionate about and always keen to look at. I will ask Mark for further comments, but I will make this commitment on the record: I think it is important and I would like to have and, in fact, we will have an audit of facilities within the building and an examination of this issue to see if action needs to be taken and can be taken. But, Mark, you may have other things to say.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sorry, Mr Webb, before I go to you, I just wanted to comment on the fact of it being throughout the building. Unfortunately, to my shame, when I raised this with a few DPS people around, they were saying, "Yes. Nice that you've caught on now that you've got almost parity in the Legislative Council with women, but we've had this problem in DPS in this building for a long time." So, yes, it does seem to be a whole-of-precinct issue.

The PRESIDENT: That's actually very helpful anecdotal evidence.

MARK WEBB: Yes, we do. You're quite correct. I think there are two levels at which we look at it. The first is the overall occupancy of the building and the overall level of bathrooms, but then, as you've quite rightly pointed out, sometimes there is a specific area of the building where the numbers of men versus women doesn't reflect the general. Just to give you a sense—in the overall building—when I was looking at this last time I looked at departmental staff, all members and LC members' staff, because LA members staff aren't here for a lot of the time. It's broadly fifty-fifty, men to women. There are 338 women, 463 men and one person who didn't identify as either gender. So it's broadly, roughly equal. For the number of cubicles in the building, overall, you've got men's bathrooms; women's bathrooms; unisex, usually accessible, bathrooms; and then ambient, sorry, ambulant—

The PRESIDENT: I'm told that their ambient as well.

MARK WEBB: Yes. Ambient—mood music. No, they're ambulant bathrooms. There are 60 cubicles for men, 60 cubicles for women, 17 unisex and people with disability bathrooms, 16 men's ambulant cubicles and 19 women's ambulant cubicles. Of course, that does not take into account urinals. Urinals are different on a bathroom-by-bathroom basis. Some have individual urinals and some have trays, so it's hard to calculate. A lot of skinny people on a tray versus people more of my size, for instance, is the variable in usage there. But each of the men's bathrooms has, obviously, at least one urinal and usually more than one, and there are 29 men's bathrooms. That's 29 sets of urinals attached with that versus 27 women's bathrooms. In an overall sense, there are slightly more men than women in the building—roughly fifty-fifty though—and it's roughly fifty-fifty in terms of bathrooms. That doesn't, however, solve the primary issue that you raised, which is that specific areas of the building can be difficult—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'll just stop you there. There are two separate issues. If you look at the Safe Work Australia guidelines for the numbers of toilets per worker, you're looking at each cubicle being appropriate for 20 men but for only 15 women, because women take longer, and every urinal for 25 men. So when you add that together, for example, on level 11, you end up with facilities for 205 men but for only 60 women. Those Safe Work Australia guidelines also go into detail about when you have particular peak periods of time that you need to take into account, and I think that's when we get to where they are as well. For example, on level 11, when we will get a bunch of members who are about to go down to the Chamber at 9.50 a.m. on a Wednesday, you cannot get a female into the toilets. There is too much of a queue. I can't believe we're spending all this time on this, but—

The PRESIDENT: It's important.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: —it's important because we've moved from being a male-dominated facility to one that is far more equal, and we need to adapt.

MARK WEBB: You are absolutely correct. I was visiting the West Australian Parliament recently, and they talked about the plight of the first female member in Australia, and she had to go to a separate house down the road to go to the bathroom. Not good situations there.

The PRESIDENT: To interrupt briefly—from memory, and I might be wrong here—this is really important, because I think that the change to the gymnasium, the squash courts and so on happened after it was raised in one of these budget estimates meetings. So this is actually exactly the right place to do it and really important to do so.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I have just never said the words "toilet" or "urinal" so much in a five-minute session.

MARK WEBB: We could have set a record for estimates. But, as the President said, I think these are very good points. And you're quite right: I've been looking at it, perhaps, in terms of sheer numbers as opposed to these proportions that you've been talking about, so I'm very happy for us to take that as an action for us to look into and go through and work through that issue.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Can I ask you another question about another gender issue? I understand that, with regard to the Parliament staff information management system, there are options available for staff titles—a form of address—and that's like the Mr or the Ms, for example. I presume there's a Mrs and others. What is the option for people who don't identify as a man or woman?

MARK WEBB: That is an excellent question that I might have to take on notice. Obviously, there is the capacity to not have any title there, but, in terms of gender-neutral titles, I cannot think of one, so I might have to take that on notice. I would say that we are in the process of starting the work on replacing that information management system. It is 25 years old and it is highly possible that, when it was first built, it perhaps did not take into account some of these kinds of issues. I wouldn't be surprised to find out that we didn't have an appropriate option, but it is one of the requirements, if you like, that we are putting together for the replacement of the system, which we've started working on this year.

As you say, that system—often called an ERP or enterprise resource planning tool—SAP, is a core system that underpins the entire way we manage staff in the organisation. The system is incredibly out of date and needs to be replaced. We are starting that process this year, and that is one of the requirements that we would put in. I will take that on notice, but I suspect the answer is going to be that we don't have adequate representation for people in that category. We should, so we definitely will.

The PRESIDENT: I will just add a couple of things, if I may. My understanding—and you can please correct me if I'm wrong—is that, on many appropriate websites or forms now, it's the prefix Mx which is now usual, and that fulfils that requirement that you're talking about. There may be others, but the point that I was going to make is it absolutely should be there. We will look and see whether it can happen on the current system, but know that the system is being replaced as part of the increase in the budget for small capital works. We are replacing the system because it's about to fall apart—apart from anything else—which everyone will notice if they don't get paid. As a part of that, this is an important issue, and I give you my personal guarantee that we will look at it as well.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, I understand that Mx became an option on 7 August this year, so that's good. I understand it hasn't necessarily flowed through to all of the other systems. For instance, on SAP and on the intranet, it still doesn't appear, and a lot of employees were forced, when they were onboarded, to pick one or the other, which is quite distressing. Also, the designation of Mx is not necessarily the most appropriate one, and the strong request that I'm hearing from queer employees is that they would prefer it if there was, maybe, some more consultation about how else we could do that to make it a bit more inclusive.

MARK WEBB: Absolutely.

The PRESIDENT: I would be very happy to do that

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you very much. I will probably leave it there and hop over to a different estimate now.

The PRESIDENT: That's the challenge with having so many on the one day.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Boyd. Will you be coming back?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: No.

The CHAIR: Thank you. President, could you update us on how you are progressing plans to mark the bicentenary of the Legislative Council next year?

The PRESIDENT: I can and am very happy to. It's obviously an extremely important event. The Legislative Council was the first parliamentary body in Australia. It was created by an Act of Parliament in Britain in 1823 that created not only the Legislative Council but also the Supreme Court of New South Wales. This makes us the oldest representative Chamber in the country. It marked the beginning of the development of our robust democracy, so it is important that it is celebrated. To do that, we are coordinating a full program of commemorative and educational events next year. Before I get into where we're actually heading, I acknowledge the work of my predecessor, the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox. He worked on a range of different events, many of which are continuing and will be a very important part of the celebration of bicentenary.

Under his auspices, the first of three scheduled conferences were held. The one that's going to be next Monday and Tuesday is called The Spark, which is around the Act that created the Legislative Council. There's a terrific program of events, which I encourage all members to register for if they haven't, with a range of important speakers including, for example, Virginia Bell and Andrew Bell. There is a tour of the Supreme Court and a discussion on the Tuesday afternoon, I believe, about the importance of the Supreme Court. There is a range of other things which are being looked at. The Architecture and Aftermath of the NSW Act is a session with two university lecturers. There's also 200 Years of Audit Impact. The Audit Office was created in 1824 and so Margaret Crawford, the Auditor-General, is also presenting. We've got a range of other events, including The Constitution Act of 1842 and the Struggle for Responsible Government with Anne Twomey.

That event in itself is going to be great. This is the second in three. Not only is it an important event highlighting those issues, but out of it comes a whole range of academic papers, which are then bound into publication between the three of them that will celebrate the bicentenary. As well, there is a range of different other events. For example, I have progressed the commissioning of an Aboriginal artwork. Mr Rath talked before about the artwork—I think it's called *The Founding of Australia*—which is an important historical piece in our collection. The former President and I both feel that it is also important to have a piece of Indigenous art of significant size also acknowledging the Indigenous history of the nation. We've already started an EOI process, which we're working through Create NSW for, to finalise that work and to identify the successful artist. That artwork will then be unveiled at the end of next year when we have our major events.

There is a range of other things that we've done. You will have seen that there's the bicentenary concert series. We are working with the Sydney Youth Orchestra and the Sydney conservatorium to ensure that every Wednesday at lunchtime there's music in the Fountain Court to allow people to consider the theme of the conference, which is to reflect, celebrate and imagine—to reflect on the past, to celebrate the present and what we've achieved, and to imagine what the future will look like. The feedback for those concerts has been terrific. I've progressed the Aboriginal young leaders program, which is going to be a program with young Aboriginal leaders from across New South Wales. It will be held towards the end of next year as well.

As I foreshadowed with the Hon. Wes Fang, there's a regional roadshow and exhibition, a series of programming, that will be held throughout next year as well, including a public speaking competition for regional students. The winner of each area will then come to Sydney to compete in the final during the October/November key period of the bicentenary, which will be a really lovely way to highlight those regions as well. A key day is 24 August, when we're having an open house back to Parliament House Day for all former members, parliamentary staff and people who have been involved in the precinct over the time. They will all be invited, and that will be a really special day too. The Clerk and I are still talking about whether that will require a small amount of costumed activity in recreation of experiences, but we're still discussing that.

DAVID BLUNT: Volunteers are strongly encouraged.

The PRESIDENT: Indeed.

DAVID BLUNT: Particularly amongst the membership of the House.

The PRESIDENT: We're also looking to have a ceremonial opening of Parliament planned for late October or early November. As I mentioned before, the CPA conference is from 4 to 8 November. That will be a key opportunity to highlight the Legislative Council. We have also partnered with the Supreme Court, St James' Church, the NSW Treasury, the Audit Office, the State Library and the Sydney Living Museums, all of whom are either celebrating their bicentenary or have significant links with the entire precinct. So we will be doing that.

I have re-established the bicentenary advisory committee, Chair, of which you are member, which is important to ensure that all sides of the Legislative Council and relevant interests can have a say in the program to make sure that we have an appropriately balanced program, reflective of our history and of the past 200 years—the entirety of the past 200 years—in an honest and meaningful way. That's what I'd like to say at this point.

David, is there anything you'd like to add? For example, I note that you convene bimonthly bicentenary awareness forum meetings. You may want to quickly refer to those.

DAVID BLUNT: In terms of the governance for the bicentenary, Mr President's referred to the advisory committee, which is a committee of members of the Legislative Council that includes the Speaker, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Mr Webb, the Parliament's Aboriginal liaison officer and others. That's really the forum that receives information about the program and provides input into the program events. In terms of implementing those events, the Black Rod and I convene a bimonthly meeting of relevant officers across the Parliament to keep everyone informed about what's coming up and establish working groups as required for specific activities.

If I can just mention one matter that Mr President referred to. He gave a great advisement for the conference that's coming up next Monday and Tuesday, The Spark, which is focused on the 1823 Act that established both the Legislative Council and the New South Wales Supreme Court. Some other keynote speakers include Bret Walker, SC, speaking about the Act itself; my predecessor, Lynn Lovelock, speaking about the parliamentary process that led to that Act being in the form it is; a range of great speakers, six leading academics, historians and various lead practitioners in the State of New South Wales, including in the legal profession.

Going back to last year, the first of the three history conferences dealt with the state of the colony in 1823—people, place and politics. There is a lasting legacy from that. Mr President mentioned papers that were presented. They're currently being compiled into a publication. All members of the Legislative Council will receive copies of these publications and they will be provided to conference participants as well. That conference last year—we sought to highlight new and perhaps sometimes ignored perspectives on early colonial history. That conference began with a wonderful presentation that will be remembered for a long time by everyone who was there, which was a reading of country for this location upon which Parliament House is located from leading Aboriginal architect Danièle Hromek.

It was a presentation in words and visual images and it really brought to life what this site has been like for tens of thousands of years and how it has been changed and adapted by human occupation. It was absolutely first rate. That was followed by a wonderful conversation between Dr Paul Irish and Ray Ingrey of the Gужа Foundation about Sydney's coastal people, who occupied the lands pretty much from here to the coast and down to Botany Bay, and down south from Botany Bay towards Wollongong, and the interactions of Sydney's coastal people with the colonists—again, a great story. You'll all be able to read that in the publication that you should be receiving in the weeks to come.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Blunt, and thank you very much, Mr President. That's the only question I have, so I intend to proceed from here with the beginning of the Government's first tranche of questions because we will have to begin it, break and then conclude.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: How long have we got, Chair?

The CHAIR: You've got 45 minutes. Do you need your entire allocation?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Oh, yes.

The PRESIDENT: And it is currently 19 minutes until the break. Is that right, Mr Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes, that's correct.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: We can continue.

The PRESIDENT: Nature is calling, Mr Primrose.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I'll text you.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Thanks, President, and everyone for attending. I want to get a feel for the catering section and what's going on there. In terms of COVID and the renovations impacting the catering section, how have they impacted it in terms of the renovations that are going on?

The PRESIDENT: Sure, I'll start. Obviously Mark is on top of all of the detail here, but I will just make a few preliminary comments. Clearly COVID and the renovations have both had a significant impact on the catering section of Parliament. Obviously in terms of COVID, visitation to the Parliament decreased significantly—first, owing to the lockdowns and then, obviously as the city reopened, people were still finding their way back to going out and so forth. What has also happened in terms of the catering is that there has been an impact on it and on the numbers because of, during the COVID time, moving to flexible working arrangements. So that meant that there were then fewer people in the building, who obviously then needed to eat less because they weren't in the building to do so.

Things started building back up again at the end of 2022, which was great, with the return of events and sitting days and there were a whole range of Christmas events in the lead-up to Christmas and so on. Then, obviously, it fell again once we got into the election period because nobody was here for some months—or, at least, a small number of people were here for some months—and, of course, there has been a challenge with the renovations and with the scaffolding being up. People were wondering if we were even open. So that's just the broad context I wanted to paint of the challenges facing catering, but Mark is obviously more of an expert in this area and may have more to add.

MARK WEBB: It's an excellent question. In 2018-19, just before COVID hit, we were the first Parliament in Australia to break even on their catering functions. So every Parliament's catering costs the Parliament some money. We're not a completely commercial concern. If I was running a commercial business, for instance, I would not hold Cafe Quorum open until half an hour after the last bells. It doesn't economically make sense to do it, but it's a service we provide to Parliament, so we of course do that. But—if you'll excuse the loose language—I am happy to charge corporate clients like a wounded bull, so we were able to use the profits from that side of the business to offset the costs associated with providing that service.

So in 2018-19 we were the first Parliament in Australia to break even with our catering area. Then, of course, COVID hit and the drop in revenue was quite significant. I think in previous areas I have gone through some of the things we did through COVID. For instance, we cooked meals for the homeless population—about 180,000 of them through that period—to keep the kitchen staff employed and busy. We produced the wonderful—if I can put a plug in—catering book that came out recently. It is an amazing book.

The PRESIDENT: It makes an excellent Christmas gift, Mr Webb.

MARK WEBB: Yes, it does make an excellent—and available at all good retailers, and when I say that I mean, of course, the Public Cafe, which is the only good retailer there is. So things along those lines that we did—but then, as things started opening back up again, just to reiterate what the President said, the CBD population is not quite what it was pre-COVID. People are still working from home. But we have managed to build the restaurant back up to be getting numbers equivalent of or greater than the pre-COVID period, so that's fantastic. But what didn't come back quite as quickly or strongly was the events and functions that we had before. You asked specifically about the impact of the building works. Especially over last Christmas and into the early part of this year, they had a reasonably big impact, but we timed the works to be through that period because we often get a big dip on an election year, pre-election and post-election. So, to a certain extent, the fact that we were in an election year mitigated some of those kinds of areas.

We've started to build back up functions and events. The corporate functions are coming back to a similar level than pre-COVID, which is fantastic. But I would say that probably member-sponsored events haven't come back quite as strongly as the pre-COVID period. Obviously we had an election in the last 12 months. We've got a lot of new members—I think about 25 per cent turnover in terms of membership—so we are going to be doing some what I guess you'd call marketing to new members to make sure people do understand what they can do. The other thing I thought I should mention is we did—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Just on that, Mark, that's an interesting line of response—I don't mean that in a pejorative sense. But how much awareness is there of the relative competitiveness of a member booking a function there as opposed to somewhere else? The general impression I get from talking to members anecdotally is that it's pretty pricey, so I want to know if there has been any work educating members about it.

MARK WEBB: That's an excellent question. When we started talking about "marketing" to members, that is part of the messaging that we need to do. You are right: There is a persistent perception that we are more expensive comparatively to other venues than perhaps we are. Of course, member-sponsored events, especially with community groups and all the rest, attract better rates than, say, we would charge to corporate entities and the like. We do, every year, check to make sure that we are competitive. We do look at other function venues equivalent around the CBD and the rest, and we make sure that we are competitive in that space. But in discussions internally, one of the things we talked about is exactly the point you make, that that perception that we are more expensive than we actually are seems to be persisting. So we need to do more to go through some of that comparative information with members, just to be sure.

I was talking with one member who'd been here for a while and they were recalling the rates as they were, say, 10 years ago. Yes, we are a lot more expensive than we were 10 years ago, but everyone is a lot more expensive than they were 10 years ago. The other issue that really impacted us through COVID was the cost of goods. There was a huge increase in produce costs and the like. We tried to contain that as much as possible but that high inflation rate, the cost-of-living issues that are facing everybody, are also impacting the cost of the food and the like that we bring in.

The other thing coming out of COVID was there was a period of time when you could not get staff for love or money, especially in the catering business. We have three agencies. As you can imagine, we have a core of permanent staff that work in catering but then, as we do functions, we have the ability to bring on some agency people to help with particular functions so we flex up and down. We have three agencies that we draw on just to make sure we can always get people. There was a point when all three agencies said, "We have nobody, just absolutely nobody, that we can bring in." As a result of that, we actually took on more permanent staff.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I was going to ask you about this because there was some chatter at some point in time—I don't know; it feels like a month ago—when the implication was that staff were being outsourced to the cost of FTEs internally. That's not correct?

MARK WEBB: No, no. It's been quite the opposite.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Have you got any figures on that, Mark?

MARK WEBB: I don't have them with me, but I can get them on notice for you.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Great.

MARK WEBB: We actually took on more permanent staff.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I would like to correct that. If it's a misconception, I'd like to correct it with my colleagues.

MARK WEBB: Yes, of course.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: If we can get it to do comparisons.

MARK WEBB: Happy to do that. I'm pleased to say that the catering staff situation, and more generally the industry, seems to be a lot better now than it was, say, a year and a half ago. But as a result of us not being able to get agency staff, in one way you could look at it that we took it on risk—we assumed that we would have a certain amount of business and that we would be able to keep a full-time staff busy. So far, that's worked out okay. So, no, it's been quite the opposite. We certainly haven't been bringing in agency staff at the expense of existing full-time people at all.

In catering—and maybe this is where some of that perception comes from—there is turnover in the catering area. People do move on to other jobs. In the period when somebody leaves and we are looking to recruit somebody else in, of course we do bring in sometimes an agency person to fill in. That could be feeding it. As you would imagine, there is a fair bit of turnover in the catering industry—people studying and are in catering, and then they finish their studies. If they've just done a law degree, they don't necessarily want to keep going with the catering business—which I don't understand, but fair enough. There could be some of that coming through, but I will get some numbers on notice and put it through to you.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Overall, in terms of economic viability and sustainability, we're on track to things looking up?

MARK WEBB: Yes, things are looking a lot better now. Obviously, we've opened the restaurant up to members of the public through the day and on sitting nights as well. Because mostly members were dining in the evening, there were times when the Strangers' Restaurant would have only a couple in it, but now we're getting members of the public coming in, that's really helped with the restaurant viability.

The PRESIDENT: Can I jump in on that—for example, something that's been tried is high teas, which are literally packed out. There's clearly an appetite for people coming in, but we just need to find what the offering is that's going to bring them in. That's the first point. The second point I want to make is I'm of the view that a lot of people don't know that they can come into the building, and getting them in the first time—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I was going to ask that, Ben, because, again, the anecdotal perception is: Do people actually know this place exists?

The PRESIDENT: Indeed.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Other than by conversations with members and relatives.

The PRESIDENT: And looking at wayfinding, for example, even the post office. I've chatted with Abu in the post office and he's like, "It'd be great if there could be some way to send a message to people outside that there is a post office in here." Obviously, there are challenges in that with a heritage building and so forth, but we're looking at that. Last weekend, for example, was Sydney Open was when a lot of the historical buildings were opened to the public. We partnered with them to bring people through on Sunday from 10.00 a.m. until 4.00 p.m. It was great. A lot of people came through. That sort of thing is important.

For the first time they come through the door and they're like, "Oh, we can come in here", "Oh, there's a restaurant here", "Oh, there's a café here." We're certainly looking at how to promote that. Another thing we've done, for example, is the 24-hour Economy Commissioner, which has developed an Uptown Accelerator Program where basically districts come together to work together to do that. We're part of the Parliament district along with the theatre world and Verandah Bar and a couple of others, so that we are going to almost lean into, potentially, the promotion of a precinct. We're looking at how that might work. We're conscious of it and the challenges around it, and we're starting to set up a range of structures to, hopefully, bring in a lot more people. Sorry, Mark.

MARK WEBB: No, that's quite all right. On top of that, as you would imagine, January, April and July are quiet months for member events. It's the summer recess, the winter recess and the Easter break, essentially, so we're engaging in the corporate market for those months more aggressively for the first time, looking at how we arrange things to make the Parliament more attractive. One of the opportunities I took in some of the refurbishment was to improve the audiovisual capability of the Parliament. That was in the Chambers, of course—things like the sound system and the ability to put in captioning and the like. There have been a lot of improvements there, but we also upgraded the audiovisual capability of the Strangers' function space as well. Now, for the first time, people can come in and run hybrid events in the Parliament. We've got good-quality audiovisual, which previously we just didn't have. That's opened up a whole new market for us in the corporate space to use the capacity of the building when people aren't here.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Actually, while you're on that subject, Mark, something that occurs me tangentially is I had a conversation with a person who is in that AV space. They made the comment that, in this era where everything's about the aesthetics, the presentation and the social media and all the rest of it, only one camera angle is available for members speaking in the Chamber. If you want a different angle, despite there being, what—six cameras?

MARK WEBB: Six cameras, yes.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: You can't get it because the multiplexing is not there.

MARK WEBB: Yes. That's been improved with the more recent changes that we've made.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Right.

MARK WEBB: But, you're right: Each of the camera angles focuses on a different area of the Chamber so we can change it to a certain extent. We traditionally had camera operators, who had much more control of the cameras than they'd ever had before. The other thing you would have noticed is we also have audio operators now in the Chamber, so the days of the President—not this President, of course—forgetting to turn on the microphone or a member speaking for a few minutes with nothing, that's all behind us now. The new systems that we have have significantly more control for the camera operators and the audio operators to make that better, but it is true that each of the cameras does focus on a particular area of the Chamber. There would be some angles that would be hard to replicate.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I think I made inquiries of one of the tech guys and the response was that they could do it but—

MARK WEBB: It would be trickier.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: It's at a bit of a cost—

MARK WEBB: Yes.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: —because you've got to get new equipment for the multiplexing.

MARK WEBB: Yes, that's right. Certainly, if you use the Chamber, the committee hearing rooms or the function spaces, we are always looking for feedback. We've tried to take our best estimate about what people would want but we are getting that kind of feedback coming back where people want other angles or different ways of doing things. We'll continue. As Mr President said earlier, we now have a better funding arrangement for the ongoing maintenance of the building so that gives us the capacity to make those changes as we go along, which we wouldn't have previously. As you would know, many times in the past I would have said, "Well, we'll put a funding bid in, but who knows whether it would get up or not." But now I can say we can schedule these things as a part of our ongoing situation.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: That's great to hear. In terms of—I know I've asked this question historically—access to the carvery for the staff.

MARK WEBB: Yes. That's a good question. We have been looking at that recently. I was talking to the catering team about this about a week ago—whether we could set the carvery up in a space that will allow both members and staff to access it and then members go to Members Dining to eat, staff go elsewhere.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I think this is very important because staff here are working long hours—as long as us and, in some cases, more—and to have access to a decent square meal is part of the relief of the day and I think it's important that we try to meet those needs.

MARK WEBB: The only thing that's been slowing us down is just finding logistically how to do it, how to set the food up. What I'd like to do is set the food up such that everyone can come to one location to get their food and then members could go to Members Dining to eat; staff would go to another area to eat. We've been trying to look at the logistics of that, but that's the only thing that's stopping us.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: That's the other thing, too, is somewhere that's dedicated for them to sit down in peace and eat nicely.

MARK WEBB: To sit down and eat, yes.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Instead of tapping on the computer in the office and eating.

MARK WEBB: That's right, absolutely. We did, as part of the level 8 refurbishment that was done recently—the first time in 40 years the space was refurbished—create better arrangements where people can eat away from their desks as part of that parliamentary staff, but we do want to find options for people more broadly as well. As I said, it has primarily been a logistics exercise. I am conscious that there is only a minute before—can I take the opportunity just to highlight something with catering, given that we are on catering?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Just quickly, by popular demand—are we done on this bracket?

The CHAIR: We are, unfortunately.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: The Wednesday night special in the Strangers'—I have been asked for a special request. It is very popular. Is it possible we could bring that back?

MARK WEBB: Yes, absolutely. That is no problem whatsoever. I would just mention that last year our chef, Vanessa Harcourt, won the 2022 New South Wales Chef of the Year in the Restaurant and Catering Association.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Oh, wow.

MARK WEBB: And this year, in 2023, the Strangers' Restaurant won the 2023 New South Wales Best Contemporary Australian Restaurant—Formal award at the Restaurant and Catering Hostplus Awards for Excellence.

The PRESIDENT: And now go to the national finals, representing New South Wales.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: We have got to market that.

MARK WEBB: Yes, we absolutely will be. As the President said, they will be in the national finals for that. That was the New South Wales award that we won; we will be in the national final next week, I think. I just really wanted to highlight the fantastic work that we—Vanessa, Carlos and the team—are doing in Catering. It is not just us, internally, saying that they are doing a great job, but getting these kinds of external recognition, I think, is absolutely fantastic.

The PRESIDENT: I should confirm that the Communications, Engagement and Education team are already looking at how to market not only this achievement but the restaurant in a substantive and appealing way. Work is already being done.

MARK WEBB: Lee would also want me to mention that we won two glasses in the Qantas and drinks magazine Wine List of the Year Awards for the fourth year running as well. Lee is very proud of his wine list—all New South Wales, I hasten to say.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Yes, I have noticed.

The CHAIR: That is fantastic and it has made me hungry. I just keep thinking about the carvery. The time being 3.30 p.m., we will have a 15-minute recess. We will reconvene at 3.45 p.m. The Government will have 25 minutes of questions left, and then it is over to the Opposition. We will see everyone back here at 3.45 p.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We will recommence with the remaining questions from the Government.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I have two questions, Mr President. The first one, through you, is to Mr Blunt, if I may. One of the most valuable documents that is put out every sitting day, as far as I can tell, is the President's program. By my estimation it goes to about half of all members and their offices. A number of people say to me, "What's that? Can I have a look, so I know when I'm due to jump?" I was just wondering whether you would consider having a look at whether it's appropriate to allow all members to receive a copy of that document? There may be reasons why not, but I just ask you to consider that.

The PRESIDENT: Of course. Before I throw to David, I'm very happy to consider that. I don't see, instinctively and immediately, any reason why not—but then, of course, I've only been in the role for slightly less than six months, and David has been the Clerk of the Parliament since 2011. He is a wise old owl who will provide us with sage advice about if this is a possibility. If it is, I would be delighted to ensure that it happens.

DAVID BLUNT: Thanks, Mr President, and thanks for the question, Mr Primrose. I'm glad that members find that document of assistance. A lot of work goes into its preparation. I'd like to just highlight the wonderful contribution of Rachel Buist in my office for the diligent way in which she puts that document together each day, with the advice and assistance of the Procedure team—and before her, of course, Kate Cadell. It really is the foundation for all of our work in the office of the Clerk and the Procedure Office on a sitting day. The minutes of proceedings flow from it. It is a really critical document. It does go to each of the Ministers' offices. It goes to the Leader of the Opposition. It goes to the Whips—both Government and Opposition Whips. It goes to Temporary Chairs of Committee. As you say, if you add up all those members, it probably is about half the members in the House, as well as Hansard and so on. Yes, I'm very happy to take that question on notice.

I would just like to check in with the Procedure team as to whether there's any reason that they can think of that it should remain a document for those office holders. It is designed to provide the procedural terms that need to be used, particularly at the beginning of a sitting day, in dealing with formalities in a proper manner, and that's why it has always gone in the past to those specific office holders who have a role in the use of those words. But, yes, I'd be very happy to take your question on notice. It would actually make life easier in some ways for my office if it did go to all members, rather than just the specific office holders, because, of course, the list of recipients currently has to be updated every time there is a change of office holder. Sending it to all members would be far more straightforward. Thank you.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you. That's what we're here for—to make life easy.

The PRESIDENT: And you succeed, Mr Primrose. Can I just add one final comment on that? One of my underlying predispositions regarding this job is that I would like Parliament to be demystified for everybody, which includes for members of Parliament. For members of Parliament, particularly for new members—who see for the first hour of the day all of these things happen, and it must come as quite a blur—anything that we can do in order to achieve that end, I think is good. I support the intent of the question, but with a caveat.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you, Mr President. I think I talk on behalf of everyone on the Committee to say how much we appreciate the work that is done by the Procedure Office and the Clerk's office—and indeed all people who provide us with such a great service, including the Committee secretariat. As I said, I think people really value and really appreciate the effort that goes in. But can I get on to my second question now? You may recall an incident where one of my colleagues who was a Minister was actually caught in a lift on her way to question time. I was wondering if you could maybe tell us what has actually happened, if anything, in relation to ensuring that Ministers are not trapped in lifts in the Parliament.

The Hon. WES FANG: Only backbenchers.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Or anyone!

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: It depends—I won't necessarily extend the question to everyone.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: And don't say we're keeping Wes away from the engine room.

The PRESIDENT: All members are very welcome near the engine room. We actually had this discussion, obviously, before estimates—talking about what the likely questions were to come up. I think the one that every single one of us agreed was likely to come up was this, in fact, exact question.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I'm here to please.

The PRESIDENT: Obviously, it's true. The need to address the aging infrastructure of the Parliament—as I spoke to, I think, in answer to Mr Rath's question—is clearly something that needs to happen, and the lifts have been identified as something which is at the top of the list in terms of urgently needing replacement or upgrade for a range of reasons. Most of the components are over 40 years old—of the lifts—and obviously they're

prone to frequent breakdowns. I'm sure that everyone, even if they weren't trapped in the lift, has had that very scary moment where doors have closed very slowly, or then they don't open again for quite some time and so on.

We know that the lifts are a major part of the Parliament's infrastructure, and we understand—obviously highlighted by Minister Jackson—that any disruption to the lifts is actually potentially critical to the operation of the Parliament, and so therefore there's just no option, but it must actually change. Our commitment is to improve the technology and the performance and the efficiency of the lift with modern structures. We are upgrading both all the passenger lifts, which are lifts one to five, and the goods lifts, which are six, seven and eight. There'll be new lift openings and landings on level five for lifts numbers two and five and on level seven for lift number seven. There'll also be new lift interiors forming part of this upgrade.

Before I throw to Mark for further detail, an important point that I wanted to make is that there will only ever be one passenger lift and one goods lift upgraded at any one time. We're not suddenly going to find that four of the five lifts are suddenly out of action, and that then causes the exact problem that we're trying to resolve. So there are some initial, overarching facts, but Mark might have some extra comments to make.

MARK WEBB: Yes, this has been an issue for quite some time. Just in a broad sense I would say that, while we've had some wonderful progress in the last few years in fixing things like the roof membrane and the work we talked about earlier at the front of the building, there is still a significant infrastructure backlog. It's 40 years since the tower block was built and persistent underinvestment for that whole 40 years, and that's resulted in areas of equipment that still there's a lot more work.

I did want to start by recognising and acknowledging, not just with the lifts but with quite a bit of the infrastructure that underpins the Parliament, there's still much more work to do. We did some work a couple of years ago and, when we factored in the normal depreciation, which is about \$18 million a year—so over the next 10 years, we have to spend \$180 million just to stand still—and then you look at the backlog of stuff, there's another \$200 million worth of backlog. We're up around \$400 million worth of work needed to catch up with where we're at. It was \$450 million a couple of years ago, but the work we've done in the last couple of years has brought that back.

The lifts—the President has covered the items that I would talk to, mostly. I would just say each lift takes about 16 weeks to upgrade and to fix. Obviously, a little bit like the facade, they will look better as a result, but the most important thing is the mechanics that sit behind the lift. We have more recently had a mechanic on site during sitting days so that we can more rapidly respond to any lift problems that we have. Minister Jackson was able to exit the lift relatively quickly because there was somebody on site that could immediately work to open the doors. In the past it's sometimes been up to half an hour before a technician could actually get here, let alone then do the work to let people out. We are taking measures to make sure that we try to maintain the lifts while we do this replacement.

We also, of course, every six months do an inspection of the lifts, do preventative maintenance and the like. But when the components are 40 years old, you can do as much of that as you like and you're still going to have problems down the track. So the one-at-a-time thing is to make sure that we don't materially impact the operation of the Parliament. As I say, 16 weeks per lift, so it is actually a program of work that will go over the next two-and-a-bit years in order to get to all of the lifts. But we will be progressively improving things through that period of time, and we are continuing to work. The funding situation with the Parliament now is that that depreciation I talked about before—the treading water part—is now funded, so we can tread water. But as a warning to my Treasury colleagues, I'll still be putting bids in because we do need to catch up on some of the infrastructure that's fallen behind as a result of that as well.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Thanks very much for your attendance today. It's my first budget estimates for the Legislature. I've been looking forward to this one. I might start off with a couple of questions about Hansard. We've been aware in budget estimates about working conditions, hours, exhaustion et cetera. It's obviously been a perennial issue. Particularly following from last year's estimates, what has been done to improve the working conditions of Hansard?

The PRESIDENT: Thanks, Ms Suvaal. I will throw to Mark shortly but, clearly, there's a challenge here and has been for many years. Because of that, Hansard developed a fatigue management action plan in late 2020. That plan is reviewed and updated annually, of course. It was then operational through the COVID times, which wasn't, perhaps, properly and truly reflective of how the Parliament would normally operate. There are a range of things that are part of that plan which I'll let Mark speak to, but the underlying point is that we want it to be more flexible. We want to ensure that Hansard staff, who just do a power of good—if there is a backbone of this place in terms of what our fundamental responsibility is, which is passing legislation and governing the State and having an accurate record of that, then that backbone is Hansard.

Mark spoke before about the increase in the number of hours. Clearly, they are extraordinary public servants, and I'm not saying that just because they happen to be sitting right here. But they are extraordinary public servants and unheralded public servants. I think that it behoves all of us to remember it every single day. I do think the adjustment of the hard adjournment from 12.30 to 10.30 has assisted. That doesn't mean that Hansard get to go home at 10.30; it means they still have to work until often 12 or one o'clock in the morning. But that's better than two or three o'clock in the morning, and that's good. Hansard are also now working fewer hours per week. For example, in 2022 some Hansard staff worked for 50 to 55 hours for seven of the 15 sitting weeks, and in 2023 to date Hansard hasn't breached 50 hours per week. We are very conscious of the issue. I think things are heading in the right way, but Mark will have some more details to elaborate.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Just in terms of those details, Mark, I'm particularly interested in how often they get time off for the extra hours that they do during sitting weeks that you alluded to, and if there are any plans to outsource some of Hansard's work in heavy periods like this.

MARK WEBB: They're good questions. I'll just start with the number of FTE and then move on to some of the fatigue things and then go to some of the issues that you've raised just then. In 2018-19, so the start of the previous Parliament, there were 20 people working in Hansard. There are now 33.6 FTE in Hansard, so we have sought to increase the numbers of people working in the Hansard team. The caveat I would put on that is that the funding that we've got for the increased numbers from Treasury has been temporary funding.

I'm pleased to say that we were successful this year in having that temporary funding extended for the full life of the Fifty-Eighth Parliament, so it's now four years' worth of funding. That has enabled me to, with normal levels of turnover, make more people permanent on the assumption that, even if the funding ran out in four years' time with the normal levels of turnover and stuff, we'd be able to deal with that situation. But it's not permanent, and I will keep going back to Treasury on that front until it is permanent funding and I can make everybody permanent in that kind of space. I did want to acknowledge that, while we have been successful in getting that money so we can hire more people, I'm not quite at the end of that journey, given the temporary nature.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Mark, can I ask a follow-up question? In terms of the proportionality, you had an uplift in demand. Have you got any comparisons with the uplift in demand hours versus FTE uplift?

MARK WEBB: I don't have that in front of me, but I could put that together. I talked about the hours in answer to an earlier question and, obviously, you can see that's been an almost fourfold increase in the number of committee hours, for instance. But, of course, committee inquiries tend to happen on non-sitting weeks, although there are exceptions to that, so we try to balance out the work between the two. Prior to 2019, of course, committee activity was a lot lower. We actually had a situation where people weren't as utilised in the non-sitting weeks, but that is a period of time that is well behind us now. Pretty much, people in the Hansard team are busy all year round now as a result.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Can I just explore something related in terms of the interface of evolving technology? We're talking about AI. The elephant in the room is there'd be a lot of fear out there about AI supplanting, and you've given evidence historically on this. Your view is that, sure, but it doesn't necessarily come at the cost of permanent employment. In fact, we can maintain, if not increase, employment plus use the technology to lift productivity. Is that pretty much your view still?

MARK WEBB: Yes, it's very similar views to previously. I would acknowledge that since the last time we talked about this in this forum, the obvious thing that has come more to the fore is things like generative AI and ChatGPT, which was not a feature, I think, of our last discussions.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: No.

MARK WEBB: We are keeping an eye on that, but at this point the accuracy of the systems that I've seen around transcription are not at the level that we would need them to be to even really contemplate incorporating them into our workflow. As you know, it's not just the transcript of what everyone says, otherwise all these ums and ers that I've thrown into the last few minutes would be faithfully recorded. It's an edited transcript. And that expertise that the Hansard team brings into what a parliamentary transcript needs to look like has traditionally not been something that technology has been able to replicate down the track.

But we have been doing things like, with the captioning system, the primary purpose of the captioning system was so that either people with a disability that captioning would be good for—it's the accessibility of the Parliament's process. It's also so that people in loud environments—so you would see we turn on the captioning in Cafe Quorum, for instance. So if you are in a loud environment you can see what's happening. The third area where we use the captioning is that it does go through to the Hansard people as an additional source of information to help with the process.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: If I am a member of Hansard, what I want to know is, given the rapid acceleration of this technology, and you can imagine a day in the not too distant future where it is potentially supplanting human beings, do I have job security?

MARK WEBB: That's a very reasonable thing to be concerned about. When we last talked about this, I will be honest, I didn't anticipate generative AI, so I know anticipating what technology will look like in the future can be a bit of a mug's game. But at this point everything that I have seen so far leads me to believe that there are things that might help with fatigue management, there are things that might help with people's ability to turn around transcripts faster and all the rest, but I haven't seen anything that would supplant the need to have a Hansard team.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Not in other parliaments?

MARK WEBB: No, no other jurisdictions that I've looked at. I do keep an eye on other jurisdictions. The English Parliament has done some work with AI and transcription generation, but the accuracy of it last time I checked was sitting at around 85 per cent. It's just not where it needs to be. Of course I can't anticipate what's going to happen next. But everything I've seen so far would lead me to believe that the way we work might change, but the need for people to do the work shouldn't. But, if that changes, of course we will be keeping an eye on it all the way through. As I say, it's a mug's game to predict exactly where technology is going.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I will hand back to Emily. But this is the beauty of technology, right? If we manage it properly, we can actually get uplift in productivity and increase employment—

MARK WEBB: Yes.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: —as long as it's not a bottom line, "Let's just get rid of staff and have the robots doing everything."

MARK WEBB: Yes. And that is certainly not the intention of any of the work we do. One of the technology areas though that we have been working on, it's previously been impossible for a Hansard person to work remotely to do transcription. We have been working on technology that would enable a Hansard team member to work remotely. You can imagine that would have some benefit, for instance, if you could go home over the dinner break and then do your transcription through the evening from home then, rather than at one o'clock in the morning have to step out onto Macquarie Street and get a taxi or whatnot, be able to then just go straight to bed. From a fatigue management point of view—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Absolutely.

MARK WEBB: —I think there are some real options there. And I know the team's been testing that. We want to make sure the technology's reliable, can work all the way through. But they're the kind of technology things we are working on to try and deal with those fatigue management issues. While we've made great strides in fatigue management, I would not say—Hansard is a very busy job, there's no doubt about it, and the team does fantastic work. So anything we can do to try and invest in the things that will help with fatigue management, help people be able to work where they need to work, how they need to work, is good investment from my point of view.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Following on from that, I suppose the line of discussion and looking at what other parliaments are doing and the issue of fatigue management more broadly, it strikes me that one of the best things we could do to address fatigue management would be to not have people here until 1.00 a.m. You are obviously acknowledging the work that's been done and the improvements that have been done in terms of having the hard adjournment in place. Are you aware of any other parliaments or work that is been done whereby there is a hard adjournment that is earlier, or an alternative to a hard adjournment, such that Hansard staff—indeed all staff—as opposed to going home and having dinner and then continuing work until 1.00 a.m. could in fact actually go home and have dinner, and just have a break?

MARK WEBB: Really good question—so there are some parliaments that have earlier hard adjournments. I can't list them off because I didn't bring the information along. But that certainly does make a difference. I have seen it referred to in other parliaments as family-friendly hours, so finishing more in the six to eight o'clock range.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: I have seen our hours referred to as family friendly as well, which I would hotly contest. I would hotly contest that they are family friendly at all.

MARK WEBB: I would agree. So that obviously can have a big difference, moving through. The other thing is, one of the reasons why the team is still here at one o'clock in the morning on a night where there is a hard

adjournment at 10.00 p.m., and obviously rising at 10.30 p.m., is the requirement to have a draft transcript ready within three hours of the spoken word.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Interesting.

MARK WEBB: One of the things that is a possibility that other jurisdictions have looked at, if you are generating a captioned transcript, which is more verbatim—it's not edited in any way, shape or form. Currently there's the draft transcript and then the final transcript kind of process. Some parliaments have looked at introducing an earlier stage, which is the verbatim, captioned transcript, and also combined with Parliament on Demand. So why do we produce the written word within three hours? If, for instance, there is debate happening in the Legislative Assembly, and you know that you are going to have to debate the same legislation in the Legislative Council the next day, you want to see what people said in preparing your remarks going forward. If you can look at the Parliament on Demand system and you can see a copy of the unedited transcript, is that enough such that you don't need the edited transcript overnight within three hours? Now, I'm not saying it is or isn't—

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Very good question.

MARK WEBB: —but other jurisdictions are asking those kinds of questions. What is it that members need in the moment, versus—of course, we eventually need an edited transcript and it becomes the record, as the President said, down the track. But why produce it within three hours? And if there's an alternative way for you to get what you need as a member that doesn't require the edited transcript within three hours, perhaps that's a way of handling fatigue, such that then Hansard can through normal business hours continue the process of editing until the point where they catch up. They are the kinds of things that we've been looking at what other jurisdictions are doing. I do keep a close eye on what other jurisdictions are doing. I think there is some really interesting stuff in that space. I haven't drawn any firm conclusions yet, but they're the kind of things that I've been looking at. So, yes, I think there are options out there. But it will be more of a conversation with you all about what you need that night versus what you need within a day, versus what you need within a week down the track.

The PRESIDENT: I will just add one final point. Under the Hansard Fatigue Management Action Plan, every Friday of a sitting week is mandated to be a recuperation day—

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Oh, good.

The PRESIDENT: —where Hansard staff don't have to work, which I think is another important step forward.

DAVID BLUNT: If I could just add to the answers already given, it's a really important set of questions that you are asking. I know the series of questions is focused on Hansard, but issues of fatigue management apply to all the parliamentary staff, all of your staff, and indeed to all of you.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Yes.

DAVID BLUNT: And there have been questions at previous budget estimates hearings to the Legislature which have gone to issues around members' work health and safety when Parliament sits very late. I would be more than happy to take on notice, if you wanted me to, a piece of work to gather information about the current rhythms of sitting times in parliaments across Australia and New Zealand, of course, the Federal Parliament—both the House of Reps and the Senate—and the ACT Assembly. But particularly the House of Reps and Senate have moved to sitting arrangements where they do finish at a much earlier time than we do. It doesn't stop end-of-sitting-period all-night sittings, and some horrendously long sittings at times at the end of a session. But, nevertheless, for most of the sitting year those two Houses are rising by 7.00 p.m. or 8.00 p.m. as I understand. If you would like me to, I would be very happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: I would love you to.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: I want to turn to cybersecurity seeing as there has been quite a few upgrades or improvements that have been sent through to us via email. I was wondering if you could provide an update on what upgrades to our cybersecurity framework have taken place over the last financial year.

The PRESIDENT: I might throw it straight to Mark.

MARK WEBB: I do have quite a few things to say on cybersecurity, but I will just caveat by saying there will be some areas where I don't go into detail about exactly how we've set up some of our defensive arrangements. As you might imagine, there might be people looking over the transcripts of this looking for those details to be provided, so there'll be a couple of areas where I might be slightly vaguer than I would usually be in answering the question. As you know, cybersecurity is an arms race. As quickly as we make improvements in our defensive capability, there are "improvements" coming in people's capacity to attack. Parliaments have in the last

couple of years become areas of focus for some of those attacks, so this is a very real issue for this Parliament and for all parliaments across Australia and New Zealand.

A couple of years ago we went to the Digital Restart Fund that the previous Government had and got funding for a cybersecurity uplift program to work through how we could improve the security in this kind of space. We did not want to rest on our laurels here because there have been significant areas. For the first time, we now have a cybersecurity team. So rather than just the IT team taking on cybersecurity as an additional response, we have a cybersecurity team and that has enabled us to bring cybersecurity experts into the Parliament for the first time. So rather than generalists who are turning their minds to cybersecurity, we now have a significant cybersecurity capacity within the organisation. We've also worked with Cyber Security NSW, which is the New South Wales government cybersecurity agency, to ensure that what we're doing is best practice.

There's a thing called the essential eight, which is used as a way of measuring the maturity of people's cybersecurity space. This is one of these areas where I'm going to be a little vague, but it's probably fair to say that two years ago we were not very far through the essential eight. It might've been an essential one-and-a-half from our point of view. I'm very pleased to say that, with the work that has been done over the last couple of years, we are now significantly progressed on our maturity in cybersecurity. We're able to tick off many more boxes on that list, and, as I say, this is an area where I'm being a little vague but I wanted to make sure that you knew that we are doing excellent work in this kind of space.

However it would be remiss of me not to remind everyone that the attacks are getting quite sophisticated. If I take a non-parliamentary example, with another hat on I'm the New South Wales president of the Institute of Public Administration Australia, and two weeks ago we appointed a new national president of the Institute of Public Administration Australia. Three days later I got an email to my home email address saying, "Hey Mark, it's Andrew the new president of IPAA nationally. I'm out on the road at the moment. If I send you through some invoice details, could you just pay a bill for me and I'll make sure that the team back in the office makes sure you get repaid?" Signed "Andrew, National President, the Institute of Public Administration Australia". This was within a week of him being elected to that role.

As valuable as the Institute of Public Administration Australia is, it wasn't front-page news that he had been appointed to that role. That's the level of sophistication we're starting to see in how rapidly people gather information from the public domain to target attacks. That's an example of phishing—sometimes called "whaling" if it's a big enough fish. I have been described as a big fish on many occasions.

The PRESIDENT: So you didn't pay that \$100,000 bill.

MARK WEBB: No, I did not pay the \$100,000 bill. I did twig that there may be an issue there and double checked on it. I just wanted to say, it's just incredibly important that we're all aware of those kinds of things and take our own precautions. The other thing I thought I'd mention, just recently you would have noticed that we instituted a new mail screening service called Mimecast. That now gives you control over whitelisting and blacklisting people sending things through. One of the issues with our previous mail-filtering service was that it works on a—these mail-filtering services essentially assess the credibility of an email address. So if you've got an "@gmail" style email address, that has a certain level of credibility because anyone can set it up versus, say, something that comes from an institution like a ".nsw.gov.au" email address, which has a different credibility. What members were finding is that some emails from constituents who come from perhaps a less credible email were getting stripped out automatically by the mailing system.

The CHAIR: The Legalise Cannabis Party.

MARK WEBB: Yes, exactly. The new Mimecast, the new mail-screening service, is much more sophisticated than the old one, so it is doing—

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Has that been rolled out to all Parliament email addresses?

MARK WEBB: It has been. You might have noticed that you're starting to get emails that say, "Hey we're holding an email for you."

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Yes, the spam filters are working quite well.

MARK WEBB: That's right. But also you can go in and say, "Hey, this email address is actually from a constituent who I know and trust, so I wish any emails from them to be sent through." You didn't have that capability before.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: With Mimecast, that's not set up for personal email addresses, for instance. It's only for "@parliament.nsw.gov.au".

MARK WEBB: That's correct.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Are you aware that a member is not using their Parliament email address but instead using a personal Gmail account? Do you have any concerns about the cybersecurity nature of that?

MARK WEBB: Members are free to use whatever technology and whatever contact details they choose to. Obviously if any member moves outside of the environment that we provide, our ability to ensure security—we don't have that ability. But we are taking feedback from members about where we can enhance our capability to ensure that using our system is convenient. I do recognise that sometimes in our desire to provide a secure environment, we can decrease the convenience of the use of our technology. We are trying to find ways of ensuring that all members have the ability to use the parliamentary environment and the more secure environment by listening to the concerns that are raised with us and trying to deal with those concerns moving forward.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Are there any guidelines regulating what email addresses we can use as members of Parliament? I assume that the same protections that are afforded to the "@parliament" email addresses aren't afforded to a personal email server, so those protections you were talking about before regarding emails from constituents that might not actually be constituents—they might be phishing emails—isn't available to a personal email server, for instance.

MARK WEBB: That is correct. Anyone who sets up an environment outside of the Parliament's environment would have to take into account those security concerns themselves. You can obviously try to set up a system that does mimic the level of security that we have, but we don't have any visibility of that.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Any guidelines about the email addresses that we can use as MPs? You can take that on notice.

MARK WEBB: I will take that on notice just in case I am missing something, but my understanding is that a member can choose to use any email address if they like. We provide a service; you can choose to use it. You could choose to do something else but we lose the capacity to guarantee anything in the way of security if you use something outside of our system.

The Hon. WES FANG: I am just going to return back to where I was previously. Mr President, did you or the security team make the decision to restrict access to your corridor?

The PRESIDENT: The security team came to have a look at the access points after I was elected as the President—sometime after, I can't remember the exact date—and certainly were of the view that it should be restricted. But I was the one who made the decision that it should be restricted.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, given that you are responsible for the implementation of the Broderick review and have a potential conflict of interest should any actions be considered inappropriate, did you seek an independent review of your actions undertaken in relation to this complaint? If not, why?

The PRESIDENT: No, I was very comfortable. I think that obviously these things—you've got to deal with each of them as they come. By their nature they're going to be bespoke and they're going to be different levels of potential broader ramifications. I was comfortable that (a) the decision that was taken would ensure that the issue that was experienced wouldn't happen into the future and that (b) the staff member concerned was provided with the appropriate level of support and was comfortable in that. That was their determination to make.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, were you aware of the Premier's comments in the Legislative Assembly during question time related to Mrs Bronnie Taylor's request for her position to be recognised in the same way that the current Leader of the Government had her position recognised through a regulation change?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, the Leader of the Government?

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes.

The PRESIDENT: Sorry, the—

The Hon. WES FANG: Ms Sharpe.

The PRESIDENT: Oh, okay. I didn't know—

The Hon. WES FANG: Ms Sharpe had a regulation changed by then Premier Gladys Berejiklian to recognise her change in position.

The PRESIDENT: I didn't know that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes.

The PRESIDENT: Was I aware? I mean, I read it in the newspapers. I'm not sure if I had heard about it before. I might have; I don't know.

The Hon. WES FANG: Okay.

The PRESIDENT: But I'm aware of what you're talking about.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, are you aware that Ms Taylor requested the conduct of the Premier to be investigated by the Independent Complaints Officer?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, I am aware of that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you aware of the ICO's findings?

The PRESIDENT: I am.

The Hon. WES FANG: Okay. Mr President, do you believe you have a duty of care to the members of the Legislative Council?

The PRESIDENT: I do and I try to fulfil that duty of care as best I can with not only all members of the Legislative Council but staff members to those members and also staff members within the Department of the Legislative Council and within the Department of Parliamentary Services.

The Hon. WES FANG: That's really good to hear. Mr President, in that respect then, are you aware that Ms Taylor was forced to file a second complaint related to stalking and intimidatory behaviour?

The PRESIDENT: I didn't know that she'd filed a complaint with the ICO.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, I'm not talking about the ICO; I'm talking about a second complaint in relation to the stalking—

The PRESIDENT: Sorry, the context before was that she'd lodged a complaint with the ICO, so the assumption from me when you said she'd lodged a second complaint was that it was with the ICO.

The Hon. WES FANG: Sorry, I'm trying to get through it quickly because time is restricted. She's filed a second complaint—I believe it was with the Parliament—in relation to stalking and intimidatory behaviour. Are you aware of that?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, I am.

The Hon. WES FANG: Can I ask, Mr President, what actions did you take to ensure Ms Taylor's right as a member of Parliament, and the rights to a safe workplace for her and her staff, were respected?

The PRESIDENT: When the issue came to me and I had a discussion with Mark about it, she asked for—this is a little bit challenging. What I said before is still germane and that is that it's entirely up to individuals themselves to make inquiries and to take whatever action they think appropriate.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm just going to specify right now: I have no intention of naming anybody in any of this questioning. I'll just put that out there that I'm not intending to name anyone but—

The PRESIDENT: I'm assuming that you're asking the questions with Mrs Taylor's permission. Is that yes?

The Hon. WES FANG: She's aware of—

The PRESIDENT: That's fine. I just don't want us to get to the end of this hearing and then her to say, "I can't believe everybody talked about this."

The Hon. WES FANG: She scares me enough to know that I would not be doing this without her utmost approval.

The PRESIDENT: No problem at all. So with all of that having been said, just remind me of the most recent question.

The Hon. WES FANG: What actions have you taken to make sure—

The PRESIDENT: Yes, what did I do? I spoke to Mark. She asked for a specific set of things to happen. There were some issues with one of those requests, of which she is aware. It was then determined, including by me at the Parliamentary Executive Group, that there should be independent legal advice to see whether—

The Hon. WES FANG: Was that a proactive decision?

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: Not on the request of Ms Taylor?

The PRESIDENT: I can't remember. I mean, she may have said—

The Hon. WES FANG: It's my understanding, Mr President, that it was originally provided to Ms Taylor that her second complaint—the investigation was to be discontinued and was not upheld. It was only on her requesting an independent review—

The PRESIDENT: Yes, that's right. I remember that. Quite true, but I wasn't involved in that first determination, by the way, in no way. When we heard about the request for an independent review, that's when we looked at these other issues. That's when we talked about it at the Parliamentary Executive Group and determined to get some independent legal advice, which we did. That was received late yesterday and I believe the Clerk has had a couple of conversations with Mrs Taylor since that time.

The Hon. WES FANG: Correct. Did you seek to understand why there was a discontinuation of the original complaint? Were you aware that there was a complaint being investigated?

The PRESIDENT: I was aware and I understood the logic behind it and I thought the logic was sound. But I also understood her position, which was that she believed that it was appropriate to have another look. That's exactly why we took the decision that we did: to check to make sure the validity of the decision legally was upheld. As I said, the determination came back late yesterday.

The Hon. WES FANG: So, Mr President, you are aware that the Parliament obtained that legal advice and subsequently then that legal advice upheld, in effect, Ms Taylor's complaint, which meant that the CCTV recorded could be used to identify the perpetrator and that perpetrator was shown to be a member of Parliament?

The PRESIDENT: I am aware of that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, were you aware—

The PRESIDENT: Although I would just say one quick caveat: I'm not sure that the legal advice upheld the complaint but it upheld the fact that the CCTV footage could be used.

The Hon. WES FANG: Which was, I believe, part of the complaint.

The PRESIDENT: Sure, I'm just—in terms of clarity.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, were you aware the decisions not to proceed was, in part, formed on the basis that parliamentary privilege extended to the member that was captured on CCTV?

The PRESIDENT: Would you like to address that, David?

DAVID BLUNT: Mr Fang, I don't want to use up your time but this is an important point to make.

The Hon. WES FANG: It is.

DAVID BLUNT: It is complex so it will take a couple of minutes. When Mr Webb's team reviewed the relevant CCTV footage and when Mr Webb was informed that it was a member who appeared, he was then obliged, under the Parliament's CCTV policy, to consult with me in relation to any issues of parliamentary privilege. The matter was not concluded at that time on the basis that there was a matter of parliamentary privilege. Quite the contrary, it was because of the complexities around the Parliament's CCTV policy and my concerns and, I would have to say, my very cautious position in relation to these matters in connection with the use of CCTV footage in relation to any member of Parliament. It was because of that very cautious approach that I provided advice to Mr Webb. I'm not suggesting for one moment that he simply adopted my advice—I'm sure he exercised an independent judgement in forming a view—but certainly my advice to him was to proceed very cautiously in this matter.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Blunt, I must say both myself and Ms Taylor have the utmost respect and confidence in your decisions on this. This is not a question of your interpretation of everything; this is a question of the actions that then subsequently occurred. Given that we've established that there were some issues around the CCTV use and that, up until yesterday, Ms Taylor was not aware that it was a member of Parliament—and that was part of the reason why the decision was to withhold some of that information. Mr President, given that you and the Speaker are responsible for implementing the Broderick review, and you would've been made aware of the complaints made by Ms Taylor and the subsequent investigation—which initially resulted in the discontinuation of that investigation—what steps did you take to make sure that Ms Taylor still had a safe workplace?

The PRESIDENT: I ensured that when the—the determination was made by Mr Webb in consultation with Mr Blunt. Mrs Taylor then asked for a review of that. That was considered by the Parliamentary Executive Group. I strongly supported that legal basis to be reconsidered, and then once it was reconsidered, to try to address

the situation. Mrs Taylor came to see me about the issue and I asked how she wanted the issue resolved. She said she wanted the member to—no, that's not true. I think she assumed it was a staffer at that time and she said that she wanted the staffer and the member employing them to come and, if I remember correctly—I don't want to put words in her mouth, but the intent was to come and sit in my office on my couch and to, in effect, apologise and to take responsibility.

After the advice was received yesterday, Mr Blunt and I had a discussion, and the way that we felt was the best way to achieve an outcome for Mrs Taylor, as she stated to me, was by Mr Blunt ringing the member, putting this to the member and suggesting that, because of the hurt for both Mrs Taylor and her staff, the member may wish to go and speak to her. He made it clear that he wanted to do that and to apologise. Mr Blunt might have other comments to make about that. Then Mr Blunt advised Mrs Taylor of that last night. So they're the actions that I took, noting that these were the wishes that she expressed to me. Therefore, last night I felt that it was a good result if the member was basically, in effect, going to accede to those wishes in what—although I didn't speak to the member—I assume and I'm advised is a sincere and genuine way.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Blunt, I've got limited time and I'm happy to continue with questions, if that's all right, because it might address some of the things. But if it's really important—

DAVID BLUNT: Just by way of a really important point of detail, the other factor in talking to the other member concerned yesterday arises from the legal advice which indicated that, notwithstanding my particularly cautious approach here, there was in fact no legal impediment to using the CCTV footage in this particular instance. The legal advice also indicated that, again, notwithstanding that I had expressed a view about there being no issue of parliamentary privilege to Mr Webb, we should take a further step, which was to engage with the member to give them an opportunity to raise any issue of parliamentary privilege, which the member did not do.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, you've sort of answered this question already: Nobody spoke to the member that was identified on that CCTV footage until yesterday. Is that correct?

The PRESIDENT: I certainly didn't, but I don't know if Mr Blunt or Mr Webb did. I didn't know who the member was.

The Hon. WES FANG: So there was no—

The PRESIDENT: Just so that you know, I wasn't advised who the member was.

The Hon. WES FANG: Were you advised that it was a member of Parliament?

The PRESIDENT: I was.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, what actions did you take, given that you were aware that a member of Parliament was the person that was identified, to ensure that Mrs Taylor had a safe workplace, given that she was already concerned about the level of harassment that was occurring and given that nobody seems to have contacted the member?

The PRESIDENT: The answer is to do exactly what I said that I did, which was to ensure that legal advice was gained to see whether there was an issue about the CCTV footage in response to Mrs Taylor's complaint. Mr Blunt certainly wrote to Mrs Taylor and availed her of the various avenues for supporting staff through this time and, as soon as the legal advice came back, I spoke with Mr Blunt, and we ensured that the remedy of the situation, as Mrs Taylor requested it to me, was immediately put in place.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm sure you can understand, though, Mr President, given that there was an awareness that this was a member of Parliament, that there had been continued harassment of Mrs Taylor, that you were already aware of the first complaint and that there was now a second incident with both her and her staff feeling unsafe, there was a duty of care, I believe, with you to speak to that member, was there not?

The PRESIDENT: I don't think so.

The Hon. WES FANG: Then how was that member supposed to not—

The PRESIDENT: No. I understand your point, and it's valid, but there needed to be the appropriate process too. We needed to make sure that if the Clerk, for whom we all agree we all have amazing respect, had a view about the identification of the member, then there was a challenge there. If the legal advice had come back and said something else, then it may well be that the sort of action that you're talking about would have been appropriate. But what we've done is we have acted on the advice, then spoke to the member—Mr Blunt has—and then the member has made the offer.

The Hon. WES FANG: If the member wasn't aware that the person had been identified, then how is the member going to cease their interactions?

The PRESIDENT: I understand the point. As I say, we went through the process. We got back the legal advice, which then ensured that this situation then continued, and the decisions were taken. If the legal advice had said something else, it may well be that your contention is right and that we would have then worked out that clearly a conversation still needs to happen.

The Hon. WES FANG: Wasn't it lucky that nothing happened between the time that we were aware of who it was and the time that we were advised of who it was?

The PRESIDENT: Obviously it's a difficult work environment.

The Hon. WES FANG: I understand that.

The PRESIDENT: It's a challenging work environment when you've got—

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, I'm going to continue with the questions, if that's all right.

The PRESIDENT: No. I want to quickly make one point. Particularly on level 11, you've got a whole lot of people who are on one level who are political enemies of each other, and so there is going to be inherently some tension and some contest. What we have to continue to do is always look at where the line is, as I've talked about in the Chamber many times. Obviously I don't want any member or their staff to feel threatened or to feel bullied or anything like that. I'm glad that we've reached where we have. If a different situation had happened with the legal advice, then I potentially would have taken a different course of action.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, is the Premier's office aware of this?

The PRESIDENT: I don't know.

The Hon. WES FANG: Do you think the Premier's office should be aware of this?

The PRESIDENT: I haven't considered that issue.

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you going to take steps to ensure that the continued conduct of personal harassment, stalking and intimidation of Mrs Taylor by members of the Labor Government ceases?

The PRESIDENT: I will deal with issues regarding any member as they arise individually. I am comfortable from the conversations I've had with Mrs Taylor and the conversation that David has had with the member that we've reached an appropriate outcome on this occasion. If other members have other issues and they raise them with me, then I'll deal with those on a case-by-case basis.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, the concern is that the privilege of the member perpetrator was of more concern than the person that was being perpetrated against. The legal advice in relation to the second complaint opened that up, but it was only because Mrs Taylor had requested a review and there wasn't a proactive seeking of legal advice in relation to that CCTV footage et cetera. Are you prepared to seek further legal advice about the LA privileges committee's determination that set aside the ICO's report to the Premier because it was also a matter of privilege?

The PRESIDENT: Obviously there's a comity of the Houses issue, but also, clearly the Legislative Assembly's privileges committee acts as the Legislative Assembly's privileges committee, and I don't think it's appropriate for me to delve into that space.

The Hon. WES FANG: The ICO was quite clear as to their view of the Premier's conduct in relation to Mrs Taylor, and it's only because of the fact that the ICO's report was deemed to impinge the privilege of the Premier that that hasn't been acted upon.

The PRESIDENT: We are actually not able to speak about the Legislative Assembly in this estimates meeting.

The Hon. WES FANG: I know, but I'm doing it anyway.

The PRESIDENT: I will respectfully decline to continue answering this line of questions. But what I will say is this: I did, yesterday, upon receipt of the legal advice, also meet with the Speaker to talk to him about the importance of updating the CCTV policy—and we both agreed on that—to ensure that it was very clear that it applied to members as well. Mr Blunt has something extra to add.

DAVID BLUNT: I add one observation in relation to the legal advice and the advice that I gave to Mr Webb. I'd want to assure you, Mr Fang, and all members, that my particularly cautious approach in relation to this matter was certainly not reached in any flippant manner. It was the result of very careful consideration of, for instance, the 160th report of the Senate privileges committee, which followed on two years of many hearings of Senate budget estimates in relation to the Department of Parliamentary Services in Canberra and issues being

considered as to whether, for instance, the use of CCTV footage in relation to a senator constituted improper interference or attempted improper interference with the free performance by a senator of their duties and whether a contempt had been committed. These are really serious matters that need to be handled carefully and delicately for the protection of the institution as well as all members within this institution.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'll reiterate, Mr Blunt—certainly, speaking to Mrs Taylor, and I know from my own view—that we do not believe that there are any issues in relation to the advice you've given. I still have further questions.

The CHAIR: If you want to ask them, there will be an opportunity after the Government's time for more questions.

The Hon. WES FANG: Okay.

The CHAIR: We now have half an hour of questions from the Government.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Thank you, Chair. I wanted to ask a few questions about the Broderick review. Could you please update us on where we're at in terms of implementing the recommendations? What more needs to be done? How can members and staff feed into that response and also feel like they're represented in that process?

The PRESIDENT: I'll make some comments to start with and then Mark may wish to continue to make a few more. The Fifty-Eighth Parliament is funding work to ensure that the Parliament can comprehensively and effectively address the review's recommendations on leadership and culture, policy, training, safe reporting, transparent monitoring and so on. A lot of work is already underway. The funding, which we welcomed, is for additional crucial work health and safety support services, the development of significant policies that will be subject to comprehensive consultation from the parliamentary community—and I'll talk about one of those shortly—plus their effective implementation, addressing some of the systemic problems highlighted from the review.

We also are ensuring that the funding will provide extensive staff training in areas such as complaints handling, leadership and appropriate workplace behaviour. In fact, a pilot session of the Respect, Inclusion, Safety and Effectiveness training session happened on the 2nd—five days ago—which will be rolled out for members to avail themselves of, as well as staff and all within the parliamentary precinct. Of course, there is also the continued work of the ICO, as previously discussed. This is important because—and again, Mark have further comments on this—from my perspective we had an HR system which was providing the bare bones of what was required. Some of the extra important cultural training and awareness and so forth wasn't provided as it should have been. This funding will actually allow 10 or 11 extra staff to be employed to implement the 31 recommendations of the Broderick report, including the support services, the training, the monitoring and so on, but also there will be a broader benefit to the Parliament in providing extra, well-rounded and important support from HR.

Other things that I have done personally since taking over are that we have done a full review of the implementation plan. That was with my office, the Speaker's office and the Speaker and I, along with Mark, his team, members of the Department of the Legislative Assembly and the Department of the Legislative Council, including a status of actions by the Parliamentary Executive Group and the new Presiding Officers. That happened in June. The Presiding Officers, Greg Piper and I, met with the PAG—the Parliamentary Advisory Group—of the Fifty-Seventh Parliament, which was, as I'm sure you would be aware, a group set up to reflect the experiences and the views of members of the parliamentary community: some members of Parliament, some parliamentary staff, some departmental staff and so forth. We met with the members of that last PAG to get feedback on the prior experience that they had and the opportunities for improvement.

We've launched a new draft policy on bullying, harassment and sexual harassment for extensive staff consultation. That was out from August to October. There were a number of different sessions, both in person and online, where people could provide feedback. A substantial amount of feedback was provided. The 12-month review of the Independent Complaints Officer by both privileges committees, I want to say, is underway. I met with Elizabeth Broderick, along with Speaker Piper, to discuss her specific views about what happened, what can be done better, what areas we need to be focusing on and so on. We are reconstituting the PAG. We have invited those members of the PAG from the last Parliament who are still part of the parliamentary precinct to be members; it is up to them whether they want to do it or not. We will work out then where the holes are in terms of representation to ensure that that representation is equal and equitable across all areas.

The other point that I'll make is that we're also appointing an independent chair of that PAG. Leslie Williams did an outstanding job as the chair, and all the feedback we've had is that she dealt with some challenging situations extremely well and extremely effectively and diplomatically. However—and she is in agreement with this—our view is the built-in power imbalance of having a member of Parliament chairing that committee with a

staff member, where everyone is supposed to have an equal voice, is potentially an issue. We're appointing an independent chair and we're very pleased to do that. I can go through those details if you want me to.

I think this is incredibly important. There is nothing more important than having a safe and secure workplace for all inhabitants of not only Parliament House but electorate offices as well—our entire community. Everyone needs to feel that they are able to come to work safely, that they are respected and that they are treated with dignity. There is a good road map for us to follow and I am committed to ensuring that that road map is implemented. Mr Webb, you might have some more comments you wish to make?

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: I might just add, obviously without betraying any confidence of the members of the PAG, could you outline for us in any detail or top-line statements about what some of their feedback was and how that's being addressed as we move forward?

The PRESIDENT: I'm very happy to do that.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Obviously the independent chair is a part of that. That's really welcome news.

The PRESIDENT: Absolutely, I'm very happy to do that. If you don't mind, I might take that on notice.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Yes, sure. Thank you.

The PRESIDENT: I don't want to just throw out words because it is sensitive.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Agreed.

MARK WEBB: In the interests of time—I'll try not to take up too much time for you, but I did want to indicate that 45 per cent of the recommendations were for bodies outside the Parliament's administration. In terms of where we're up to at the moment, I wanted to highlight that I recognise there are things to do outside of the Parliament that Elizabeth Broderick recommended that I might not cover in my discussions today. Out of the 115 actions we took on, we've completed about 25 per cent. Roughly another 25 per cent to 30 per cent are in progress at the moment or haven't started, and the other 45 per cent are the ones that are outside of the Parliament's administration.

The PRESIDENT: I will just jump in there for a moment. For example, part of the feedback—and some of those are within the remit of political parties, for example. Part of the discussion with the Parliamentary Advisory Group was about how political parties can fulfil the responsibilities we would like them to fulfil under the Broderick review, in terms of those 31 recommendations, which is another topic of conversation that we had with Liz as well.

MARK WEBB: I did want to recognise that our original plan probably didn't take the election into account enough. We had sort of had us running all through the start of the year but, of course, as you would imagine, coming back off Christmas we hit the blackout period. More people were on the hustings than were focused on what was happening here within Parliament House, so we did make a deliberate decision to push back the timing of some of the actions—for instance, consultation on the policy that's been out in the field recently—until after the election had happened, people had a chance to recruit staff and those staff could settle in a little bit. So some of the things we were intending to start in February/March, we didn't end up starting until more like July/August.

I did want to recognise that those delays were deliberate decisions to try and make sure—you mentioned before the importance of proper consultation and actually getting people's views. We viewed delaying and making sure we could do that as being more important than artificially rushing a process to meet an arbitrary deadline and not have that quality of consultation coming through. So, yes, quite a few things did push out into this latter half of the year. We also were conscious that both of our Presiding Officers were retiring at the election, so we had new Presiding Officers coming in. We also wanted to make sure that the new Presiding Officers had a chance to look at what we were doing as well.

I did want to highlight one of the things that the President just mentioned. I do recognise that my human resources team were only funded previously to really do the operational part of HR—i.e., make sure the payroll is run and make sure you get the right paperwork if you're recruiting somebody. Some of the things we were doing as a part of this work is work that you should expect the HR team to do, but traditionally we have not been funded to do. So I was very pleased to be able to make the case in our Treasury submission to bring in additional trained expert resources in wellbeing, in trauma-informed handling of complaints and the rest.

I'm pleased to say that obviously recruiting that many people took a little bit of time, but we have an excellent team of people who are working very hard to make sure that everything we do is as a result of consultation, takes trauma-informed approaches in mind and reacts to the feedback that we're getting, even to the

point of, say, the feedback that Ms Boyd gave earlier today about people from the LGBTQI+ community. As you'll recall, the Broderick review very much showed that people from that community were having a particularly tough time in the parliamentary environment. So even the kinds of things that Ms Boyd was recognising before, we need to be open to hearing that feedback and making more adjustments as we go forward.

I did want to say that the Broderick review was an incredibly important stage in the Parliament's evolution, but we can't just tick off a bunch of stuff from the Broderick review and then say, "The job is done. Move away." One of the challenges that I've set for my team and the challenges in our consultation is to say, "Don't be limited to what the Broderick review has said. It is a jumping off point for further improvement, not the end point of that." Of course, I do want to acquit the Broderick review—I do want to be able to say, "Yes, everything that was done there we've been able to do"—but I very much view it as a jumping off point for the future, not an end point in and of itself. So more feedback like the kind of feedback that Ms Boyd gave before is crucial to making sure that we keep that process going moving forward.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Certainly very wise to see it as a floor, not a ceiling. I presume you were talking about the 10 or 11 extra staff?

MARK WEBB: Yes, that's correct.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Can I clarify, are they temporary or permanent?

MARK WEBB: No, permanent. We did get some temporary money for individual things like reviewing policies and the like, but the 10 or 11 staff that we've added to the HR team are permanent staff. It was to bring the HR team up to the level of resourcing necessary to do this job properly and to do it for the long-term, not just for a short-term implementation.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: In terms of the training that I think you referred to earlier, Mr President, can I clarify, is that training optional or mandatory?

MARK WEBB: It's mandatory for staff.

The PRESIDENT: It's certainly mandatory for staff and strongly encouraged for members.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Is there any view to change that?

The PRESIDENT: I'm not sure that it's possible for us to mandate members of Parliament to attend the training, but we'll do all we can to strongly encourage them to do so.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Thank you. Very commendable. I will pivot now to a slightly different line of questioning, and that is with regard to the amount of crystalline silica that is in the New South Wales Parliament. Has there been any work undertaken to audit where there is the presence of engineered stone and/or sandstone, because that's obviously a very large amount of sandstone? What work is underway to ensure the safety of all staff, particularly with the exposure to respirable crystalline silica?

The PRESIDENT: This is obviously an extremely important and very current question, and very appropriate for you to raise it. I will throw to my colleagues on this one.

MARK WEBB: Yes, absolutely—a very important question. There is engineered stone across the parliamentary precinct. In fact, when you go back to your office and you look at your kitchenette, there is engineered stone there.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Yes, I have noticed—in the bathrooms too.

MARK WEBB: Yes, bathrooms as well. In the cafe as well there is engineered stone. So we do have engineered stone throughout the precinct. The first thing I wanted to say is that we have enacted protocols within the Parliament that if any work is being done in a space where there is already engineered stone, for instance, we don't cut into the engineered stone. Because, as you would know, a lot of the risk comes when—a little bit like bonded asbestos. It's not the bonded asbestos, it's the loose asbestos—similar things with the engineered stone as well. We put protocols in place to treat engineered stone in the way that we would treat any hazardous material, and we have well-advanced areas there. I have put a stop to—there's no new engineered stone coming into the Parliament.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Very good.

MARK WEBB: Obviously, I do recognise that this is an issue that's being debated in the public.

The CHAIR: I notice you didn't use the word "ban".

MARK WEBB: Essentially, I have stopped it. You could call it a ban. I came to the conclusion that, while the issue was being debated, I would rather err on the side of safety, so I have said no more engineered stone. You mentioned sandstone before.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Yes.

MARK WEBB: I don't want to overstate it, but there is a lot of sandstone at the front of the building, in particular, and we've been doing a lot of cleaning of that sandstone.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: I've noticed.

MARK WEBB: You would've noticed people in PPE equipment.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: I noticed people who weren't in PPE also.

MARK WEBB: Then we will follow that up with the builders in question. We've also been looking at where we need to paint the sandstone. Where there's exposed sandstone versus painted, you will notice the columns at the front of the building. The lower columns are all sandstone. The upper columns are actually wood that was made to look like stone in the 1800s because they ran out of money. They made wooden columns upstairs and then just painted them to look like they were stone. My issues there have more been termite related rather than silica related. But the downstairs ones have been painted, and we're having a look—one of the issues with painting sandstone is that it doesn't breathe anymore, and that was a cause of some of the air quality problems at the bottom. So we've been looking at a particular type of paint that allows stone to continue to breathe while bonding the surface going through there.

There continue to be issues. For instance, you might have noticed that we painted the front fence and now we seem to be stripping all the paint off the front fence again, because in the eighties they used a lycra-based paint and all the paint we put over the top of the lycra-based paint just peeled up within a few weeks of us painting it down. This building is full of surprises—you never know what's going to happen when you turn a corner—so we are taking these things very seriously. As I say, there is now a hold on the use of engineered stone in the space. We'll watch, obviously, what happens in terms of decisions of government and the safety authorities and the like, but my intention is always to have safety as a primary issue as we move through. Thank you for the feedback on people working on stonework out the front. I will definitely follow that up.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: In the time we've got left if I could pivot back to the Broderick review. You mentioned earlier the PAG, the advisory group. It's great that that's been reconstituted for the Fifty-Eighth Parliament, and we'll look forward to—

The PRESIDENT: That was a key recommendation of the Broderick report too.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: What sort of function do you see that having moving forward over the Fifty-Eighth Parliament?

The PRESIDENT: A couple of things. Firstly, as the name suggests, it's an advisory group, so the Speaker and I are particularly keen to lean on it to provide expert advice and an understanding of each of the unique environments in which each of the members work, and the impact of decisions, therefore, on each of them. But, more than that, we see the PAG as a potential opportunity—when we look at, for example, some of the recommendations that may have been a little more challenging to implement—to give them the recommendation and say, "Provide us with what you think the road map should be in terms of how best this should be implemented."

For example, we haven't had the initial meeting yet because the applications are only just closing very shortly, but one of the things I will be doing—just to pick up on an earlier point and one of the things that I foreshadowed that the Speaker and I are likely to do—is to ask them to consider what is the best way for political parties to consider the issues that were raised, noting that we obviously don't have power over each individual but that there are a range of other potential alternatives. But that's exactly the sort of group that I think would provide excellent advice for that. So we'll certainly give them an opportunity to provide information and advice in a—they can just provide it to us without being asked for a specific avenue for them to follow but, on the other hand, we will also be asking for specific questions for them to provide us with advice on. I envisage them having a relatively broad remit as we continue to work through, but I want to pick up a point that Mr Webb made, which is, of course, the work here is never done. Yes, these are important recommendations, and we need to implement them as best we possibly can.

However, the Parliament, and in fact any large workplace, is by nature a dynamic environment, and when we address one challenge a new challenge will arise. We want to make sure that there is an opportunity and an avenue for when new challenges do start to exist and new behaviours do perhaps start evidencing themselves—that there is a structure set up where people can immediately feel that they can report it or provide information

about it or provide that feedback, that it's done in a non-threatening way, that they feel that they are able to do so and that their opinion would be welcomed, so that those sorts of behaviours can be addressed as quickly as possible. I think that one of the challenges that we've had in previous decades is the fact that, I suspect, many staff members, particularly in this place, felt, "That's the way it always is, so there is nothing I can do to change it." The most important thing that we can do here is make sure that everyone understands that they have a pathway, they have an opportunity to be heard, their concerns will be treated extremely seriously and they have advocates who will look to ensuring that they can make this place as safe and respectful a workplace as possible.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Thank you. I'm just looking to my colleagues to see if they have any further questions.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I do have this quick one—the old chestnut. Mark and I have had discussions on this, and so have you and I, Ben—

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Mr President. Sorry, Wes—regarding the development of a members' app.

The PRESIDENT: App.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: You got it, yes. The reason that I think this would be very handy is because members have a whole lot of contact points via the web and various other pieces of information that they need to pull together in a very short time, particularly on sitting days, as we all know, and I think there would be so much we could integrate into it that a very well-done app would be of immense help to members. I just wanted to ask you where that was up to?

The PRESIDENT: I like the idea. My view is that anything that we can do—and the same point that I made about the President's program before—to demystify this place and to demystify the roles and the responsibilities of members and of their staff is a good thing. For example, one of the things that we're doing—I can't remember if you were there, I'm sorry, Mr Buttigieg, but at the committee chairs meeting that I held about a month ago one of the things that was discussed was a new committee members' hub on SharePoint—which we'll be trialling but hopefully we'll roll out to all committees—which will provide, basically, incredibly easy, one-stop shop access to all committee documents and will provide everything from the dates and the submissions and the meeting papers and so on, because, at the moment, as you know, it's incredibly challenging to take into account and to keep control of all the emails that are coming in all the time.

This one-stop shop for committee documents will, hopefully, make all members' and particularly all staff's lives much easier. That's exactly the sort of thing that I think is really good, and that's—if you'll excuse me putting words in your mouth—exactly the sort of thing that I suspect you'd like to do more broadly. I presume you'd welcome that but you would like, more broadly, for all functions of a member of Parliament to be able to be centralised in one place as much as possible.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Yes. The analogy exemplar I would use is one we're all familiar with. I know banks have got endless amounts of money but if you look at some of their apps and how easy it is to do banking on your phone—it's not just banking, anything—a well-developed app can actually save you a ton of time. We are in an era now where members are increasingly relying on their phones. I'm writing speeches sometimes on my phone in the Chamber, as I know a lot of members are. I think there's all this effort going into websites, SharePoint and whatnot, and that's all good. Don't get me wrong; it's steps forward. But a one-stop shop app with—and I've said this before—running down to the Chamber so you don't break your leg, a timer on your app to show you how much time you've got left before you get down to a division, or amendments in real time embodied in the document while you're in the Chamber so that you can actually follow. Things like that, I think, are all eminently doable. I know it rolls off the tongue, and it takes a lot of work in development.

The PRESIDENT: And there will be both development costs and, of course, then there will be staff, maintenance, upkeep and running costs, so those two things are obviously substantially challenging. But Mark might have some more comments he'd like to make.

MARK WEBB: I think they're excellent comments. Beyond the things that have already been mentioned—and I would say, generally, we are very conscious that we rolled out a lot of tech in the last few years, especially to react to COVID. The fact that you can have virtual witnesses and virtual participants in committees and the like—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: It was a huge step forward.

MARK WEBB: Yes, it was a huge step forward. But we are very conscious that we rolled out a whole bunch of—three years ago only a few people had laptops, and now everyone's got laptops. We're actually getting to the point where we're about to start replacing the ones that we first gave out, down the track.

The PRESIDENT: In fact, before you go on, I think we are actually the only jurisdiction that has live broadcasts, regionally, in the country, so we're seriously focusing.

MARK WEBB: That's exactly right. We can live broadcast committee hearings that happen regionally, which nobody else can do. We're the first Parliament to go down the captioning path. There's some really good stuff there, but we are very conscious that we rolled out a whole bunch of tech, and we really do need to circle back and make sure people can use that tech in the most effective way possible. Things like this committee hub is a great example of people circling back and saying, "This is tech we actually rolled out a couple of years ago, but let's try and make it work." On the specific issue of the app, we've talked about it a couple of times before, and it is something that's very close to my heart and something that we want to try to work towards.

A couple of things that we've been doing—we had a little experiment in trying to create a members' portal. It didn't go very well, I will be the first to admit, but we learnt a lot from the process of going through and doing that. It didn't quite have things like timers of divisions, but it was an attempt to start to bring together the information that a member might use, personalise it to that member and provide that directly. We tried to build that in a way that, if you had your computer in front of you, you could look at it on a website or, if you were on a phone, it could reshape itself to the phone and work in the phone situation as well. I don't want to raise your hopes, because it didn't work very well, so we went back to the drawing board.

One of the things we found—you mentioned banks, and that's a really great analogy. If you look at the apps for a bank that's been around for a long time, they're a bit crappy. The under-the-surface stuff that they have to do to make those apps work is not great. Some of them are still connecting to old green screen computers and trying to get data out of databases that are 40 or 50 years old, whereas, if you look at a bank that built everything from the ground up digitally, their app is much better.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: That's the key.

MARK WEBB: I changed banks recently. I moved to a bank that has a digital-first approach and applied for my account. They checked online credentials and the like and the account was set up within minutes, as opposed to having to go into the bank with 100 points of ID and doing various bits and pieces. We are more like the banks that have been around for 40 or 50 years than we are like the new digital banks. We have data and information in lots of different systems. Some of them are new and some of them are old. One of the things we hit when we started experimenting in this space is the capacity of bringing data from all of those different sources together into an app.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: That's the challenge, yes.

MARK WEBB: That was the challenge. One of the things that we're looking at, at the moment, is to take critical data and move that into a more consistent underlying format to make the development of apps and the like easier into the future. We are going to continue to experiment and see if we can find some way of making things work in the short term as well.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Has the development been factored in as part of the tech budget?

MARK WEBB: I caveat by saying that the demands on the tech budget are more than the tech budget in any given year. But, yes, it is one of the things that we're looking at as a part of that. The balance between how much money do I put into improving the underlying infrastructure versus accepting the underlying infrastructure and trying to build something over the top of it, that's what we're debating at the moment—to see what the right balance of investment is moving forward. But it is definitely in the mix of things we're looking at and we are in a much better position now to make forward plans. With the recently passed budget, as I say our depreciation is now funded, which means that I can plan multiple years in advance. As you know from previous discussions, previously I was year to year on what the investment would be; now I can plan multiple years in advance, and that will make a big difference to how we move forward.

The PRESIDENT: And we're very grateful for that.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Let's keep the discussion going. If it hasn't come to pass by the end of my term, you will ensure that I'm preselected so that I can see this come to fruition.

MARK WEBB: So you can see it come to fruition.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: You'll be fine, Mark. You've got the unions.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Buttigieg and Mr Webb.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr President, in relation to Ms Taylor's complaint, obviously there's nothing resolved at this stage. What do you believe the next step will be?

The PRESIDENT: I hope Mrs Taylor will take up the offer of the member to speak with them, or to listen to them, perhaps, is the more appropriate term. I hope that she believes and feels that that member is appropriately remorseful for their actions and for the impact that it's caused on her and her staff. That's what I hope happens, which is in line with what she said to me she would like to happen.

The Hon. WES FANG: Obviously that was prior to her advice that it was a member of Parliament. Do you believe that there is a need for a stronger response, and do you believe that the Parliament's handling of this perhaps has some lessons that could be learnt?

The PRESIDENT: I guess there's a couple of things. First, in her response to me she said that she wanted to speak to the staff member—she assumed it was a staff member—and the member of Parliament. I do think that response would then be in line with the original request. But obviously this is something that she needs to determine in terms of what she wishes to do from here. As I mentioned before, it's entirely within her gambit to work out how she wishes to respond. In terms of the parliamentary response, clearly now we have some legal advice about CCTV protocols, about both the policy and signage, and so on. That is something that we'll be following up and the Speaker and I have already spoken of. I think that is appropriate.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm just going to provide these to Mr Blunt, or maybe Chris can hand these to Mr Blunt. Can you confirm for me that those are documents that are from the government portal? They are the remuneration Act for members of Parliament. The other document is a regulation that was gazetted by the Government in relation to a regulation change to the House.

DAVID BLUNT: Yes, these come from legislation.nsw.gov.au. One is a copy of schedule 1 to the Parliamentary Remuneration Act of 1989. The other is one of the many regulations that have amended—it's an unusual Act in that the schedule can be amended by a regulation—it doesn't necessarily require an Act of Parliament—and the other document is a regulation from 2019 of such an amendment.

The CHAIR: Just before you proceed, can I ask that those documents be tabled to assist the—

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes, I intend to table those documents.

The CHAIR: You will?

The Hon. WES FANG: I will, yes.

Document tabled.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Blunt, the regulation that you've got there, that relates to a change to have a position recognised in the Legislative Council that was previously recognised in the Legislative Assembly. Is that correct?

DAVID BLUNT: Sort of. Over the years there have been many changes to schedule 1 to the Parliamentary Remuneration Act affected by regulation—often two or three a year. This one in 2019 was a temporary arrangement to cover off a specific circumstance when the Leader of the Opposition—so the full Leader of the Opposition was a member of the Legislative Council rather than the usual arrangement where they are usually a member of the Legislative Assembly. It was for a short period of time of two or three months, as I recollect.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Blunt, is it correct to say that the current Leader of the Government, the Hon. Penny Sharpe, had a regulation change in effect to have her remuneration recognised as a member of the Legislative Council for a position that she was elected to, which was the leader of the Labor Party at the time—or, sorry, the acting leader of the Labor Party?

DAVID BLUNT: I think that is the case but if I could just take that on notice as to whether it was Ms Sharpe. But it was certainly the Leader of the Opposition at the time.

The Hon. WES FANG: So if it was Ms Sharpe, it was in effect the same person that Mrs Taylor had to write to to seek a regulation change for her position as the Deputy Leader of The Nationals to be recognised in the House.

DAVID BLUNT: Is that a question or a comment?

The Hon. WES FANG: No, it was unfair to ask you the question that I was about to put, so I'll put it in a different way. The Premier criticised Ms Taylor in the Legislative Assembly for seeking a regulation change

that Ms Sharpe got a regulation change for. Do you recall if there was any political attack on a member of the Legislative Council when this regulation change went through?

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. WES FANG: Or was there a—I think I've made my point anyway.

The CHAIR: Members should not be seeking an opinion from public officials.

The Hon. WES FANG: You are right and I shouldn't have done that.

The CHAIR: Maybe you could reframe it, Mr Fang.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm happy to try rephrasing it again. The Premier took a cheap political shot at Ms Taylor for seeking a regulation change that Ms Sharpe got put through when she needed a regulation change to have her position recognised. Mr Blunt, is it an unusual thing for a regulation change like this to—has it occurred previously, more than once?

The CHAIR: Just to be clear that Mr Blunt is responding to the question at the end of that preamble.

The Hon. WES FANG: The question, yes, not the preamble that I put on the record, no.

The CHAIR: Yes, let's just be clear.

The Hon. WES FANG: That's correct, Chair. Thank you.

DAVID BLUNT: Thank you for your ruling, Mr Chair. As I said before, there have been numerous changes to schedule 1 of the Parliamentary Remuneration Act over the years made by way of regulation. The parliamentary administration has very little visibility, usually, as to the circumstances in which those regulations are made and the representations that may have preceded them. Certainly I'm not going to comment in any way about any parliamentary proceedings in the Legislative Assembly.

The Hon. WES FANG: I certainly didn't expect you to, Mr Blunt.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: I want to ask questions about payroll systems now and SAP.

The CHAIR: Good. Now I'm interested.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: I apologise at the outset for questions that may seem clear to others who may have been in this place longer than myself.

The PRESIDENT: This is actually a very pertinent question.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Is there only the one payroll system that we use? For members, staff, DPS—

The PRESIDENT: I'd like Mark to answer all of these questions, but can I just make one or two preliminary comments and that is this system is falling apart. It's being held together with bandaid and baling wire, and it needs to be replaced. The funding that has come from this budget is going to allow us to replace it. We are grateful for that. I now throw to Mr Webb.

MARK WEBB: I wish I had baling wire. That would be a step up. Yes, the underlying system is the SAP system. It is a very old SAP system.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: I noticed.

MARK WEBB: Yes. I think SAP for HANA is the more recent one. We're not even close to that. The project that the president mentioned would be to replace it with a modern version of SAP.

In terms of payroll, yes, we do a fortnightly payroll run for staff and we do a monthly payroll run for members. That all comes out of the same underlying system. Of course, we have the capacity to do an ad hoc run if we need to. Wherever possible, we try to feature any back pay or whatnot into the next normal run because it's easier and less error prone if we do that, but there are situations where a staff member might be out of pocket—I heard recently that out of pocket means different things to different generations—as in, somebody having not had the money that they deserve to have. In those situations, we will do an ad hoc run. You also mentioned vendor payments as well. Again, that's in the SAP system and, again, we do a weekly run to pay vendors.

We use the Government guidelines as best practice. We, of course, as the Parliament, are not required to use the Government guidelines, but we use it as an example of best practice, including the requirement to pay vendors as quickly as possible after the goods have been receipted. So we do a weekly run and, again, we have

the capacity to do ad hoc runs when we need to, but we prefer to do it as a part of the normal run because, again, it is less error prone than ad hoc.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: So the remunerations for members of Parliament would be the same: a weekly run for things that are paid out of—

MARK WEBB: Yes, for things like members' entitlements and the like, that would be in the normal run. As you know, the electoral allowance is paid with your salary every month—just divide it by 12 and pay it that way. But for all other entitlements, when a verified claim comes through we put it in the next one.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: And I presume there is a cut-off date for that. What is that, and is that somewhere written down?

MARK WEBB: Yes, that's a really good question because it is something that is probably breached more than it is followed. So for fortnightly pay runs, the pay goes out on Wednesday night. The cut-off date is the previous Friday for that. So there is a three business day cut-off. I would say, on any given fortnight, the team processes quite a few exceptions within that three days, but that is where the cut-off is. Likewise, for the monthly pay run, three days before the monthly run, that would go in. Similarly, for the weekly vendor payments we try to have everything in place three days before, although in that particular case we do try to take into account as many things as we can, so sometimes that cut-off drifts a little closer to the actual payment.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Further to the SAP portal, it's my understanding that you are unable to apply for prospective leave. I'm looking at planning a holiday next year. I haven't accrued the required leave, but by June next year I'll have accrued that leave.

MARK WEBB: You will have accrued it, yes. That's right.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: But the system won't automatically calculate it for me and book it in. I get an error message and I have to call or email HR.

MARK WEBB: Yes, that is correct. That is one of the things that we are looking to fix as a part of the new system. The system, as it's set up at the moment, does look at what your leave balance is at the moment when you're applying for the leave.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Which would strike me to create more work, really, for the payroll team.

MARK WEBB: It does, yes. Absolutely.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: What is the time line for the implementation of the new SAP, if you like?

MARK WEBB: That's a great question. We've just kicked off the project. For the remainder of this financial year we're going to be—requirements and designing the system. We recognise that this has tentacles into a lot of different parts of the system. This is not one of these things that we can just replace and it has no effect anywhere else. We did look at trying to do the entire project in a 12-month cycle, but we could not do it in a safe fashion. The remainder of this year is requirements and design, and then we will go to market for someone to implement, and we will implement starting from 1 July next year. How long it will take to implement will depend a little bit on what comes out in the design.

What I want to try to do as much as possible is—bespoke customisations can really cruel these kinds of projects. You start saying, "The Parliament needs to do things differently to what the rest of the world does." Every time you say that, you've got to do a bespoke customisation of something like this. Every bespoke customisation takes longer to implement and also creates the potential that when they upgrade the system it breaks your bespoke customisation. So part of the design is to try to minimise the amount of bespoke customisation that we have to do. But if it turns out that in order to meet the Parliament's quite unique circumstances we need bespoke customisation, that will extend the project for a bit longer. If we can do things a little bit more out of the box, it will bring the time in.

At the latest it would be the end of next financial year, but we are hoping to do it significantly before that. The end of next financial year would be a very bespoke system, if we went down that kind of path. So design for the remainder of this year, implementation next financial year—so in 18 months from now we will have the new system in place. Hopefully earlier than that, but that's the kind of time frame I can commit to.

The PRESIDENT: I was just about to ask if Jocelyn had anything to add, since she's the finance lady, but you've escaped, Jocelyn.

The CHAIR: That was such an excellent time frame, Mr Webb, and a great answer. Thank you very much for questions from the Government. That concludes our inquiry hearing today. Thank you all very much for

your attendance and your evidence. We very much appreciate it. Any questions on notice, we'll be in contact with you about those and you will be provided with a transcript to respond in due course.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.