

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

2017–18 ANNUAL REPORT HEARINGS



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2018**

**SESSION THREE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES**

Members

**Hon Alanna Clohesy (Chair)
Hon Tjorn Sibma (Deputy Chair)
Hon Diane Evers
Hon Aaron Stonehouse
Hon Colin Tincknell**

Hearing commenced at 3.01 pm

Hon SUE ELLERY

Minister representing the Minister for Community Services, examined:

Mr GRAHAME SEARLE

Director General, examined:

Mr BRAD JOLLY

Acting Assistant Director General, Service Delivery Regional and Remote Communities, examined:

Ms JACKIE TANG

Assistant Director General, Metropolitan Services, examined:

Ms HELEN NYS

Assistant Director General, Policy and Service Design, examined:

Mr ANDREW GEDDES

Executive Director, Regional and Remote Services, examined:

Ms TINA PRITCHARD

Director, Finance, examined:

Mr LIAM CARRON

Chief Financial Officer, examined:

The CHAIR: This is the hearing with the Department of Communities. On behalf of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I welcome you to today's hearing. Have each of the witnesses read, understood and signed a document titled, "Information for Witnesses"?

The WITNESSES: Yes.

The CHAIR: It is essential that all your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. It is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private. If, for some reason, you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question. Agencies have an important role and duty in assisting the Parliament to review agency outcomes and the committee values your assistance with this.

Minister, do you have a brief opening statement?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I do not.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We will start with Hon Tjorn Sibma.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, I am going to focus my questions on the outcomes of the machinery-of-government changes and how they impact the agency's capacity to deliver frontline services, particularly in respect of the various child protection functions.

Just so that I can gauge performance across time periods, I refer to the director general's executive summary on page 6 and the second paragraph. Just to paraphrase, it states that the Department of Communities is presented as a flagship department, which has a unique opportunity to fundamentally improve the way in which people receive its services. My question is: in the 12 months or more since the formation of the Department of Communities, which specific improvements have been made in respect of child protection services?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will get the director general to make some comments about that.

Mr Searle: Thank you, minister, and thank you, member, for the question. The thing we have been very focused around is how we can link up the various parts of the department to solve the complex challenges that families have. To some extent, in the previous structures of government we treated drug and alcohol abuse, mental health, homelessness, poverty, family and domestic violence and child neglect as though they were independent events. We did not have a coordinated response. What we are now seeing within the department is that when families have challenges and issues, the bits of the department get together to work out just how they can change the outcome by bringing all the bits together. I will give you two very specific examples, if that would help the member understand. We had a young man from Broome who was in jail —

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Is this part of your annual report? I have read those case studies, director general, so there is —

Mr Searle: There are two. There is one about the man in jail and what we did with his mother and his children, and there is one about a small Aboriginal child. Those things would not have happened under the previous structures of government. That sort of "linking up" to work out how we can bring the bits and pieces together to change the outcomes for families has been the big change that has happened over the last 12 months.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Those changes would be very significant for the individuals concerned, but it is difficult for me to gauge the qualitative and quantitative uplift in service delivery if I am just to focus on the annual report. Can you measure these things in terms of impartial or observable KPIs?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Perhaps I will make some overarching comment. In the first instance, it is going to take some time to see significant turnaround in those kind of systemic ways that you might start to measure what the impact on one small family actually has in a more broader perspective across all the people served by the parts of this agency. To a certain extent, within the first 12 or 18 months you might not necessarily see that kind of systemic change. It is about changing the culture. It is about trying to breakdown the silos that existed between the respective social service delivery agencies, if I can call them that, and that will take some time to deliver. But I might ask the director general if he can make any comments about the kind of KPIs that ultimately would reveal whether or not this has been successful in terms of service delivery.

Mr Searle: I think there are a couple of things that we need to do in terms of readdressing our KPIs. I would expect we will see a change in the speed at which children are reunified with their families. I would expect that to move over time. We have a couple of very tangible things at the moment coming out of Kununurra. We have been running, with the help of a number of other agencies, school holiday programs to try to reduce the amount of offending. We have now got to the stage where instead of having 10 kids each school holidays ending up in Banksia Hill from Kununurra, for the last long school holidays only three kids ended up in Banksia Hill. That is a very tangible, hard measure. Youth crime was down and the kids were well engaged with the program. That was done at no extra cost to government. It was just a better coordination of the services and what they provided during that holiday period. There will be a number of hard bits of evidence to support this over time.

[3.10 pm]

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I look forward to that. Can I also refer you to another part on page 6 just concerning the bedding down of machinery-of-government changes. I have never envied you your task at all. The claim is there made that —

Our first year has seen the integration of our strategy, policy, corporate operations and commissioning areas ...

That is all well and good, but can I get a sense of what further work remains outstanding in terms of full integration of the department?

Mr Searle: There is a raft of things that we need to do to complete the integration. One of the things we are doing in the structure, as we have outlined in the report, is changing the whole nature of our reporting structure to be regionally based and place based. The other bit is that we started with four finance and payroll systems, four HR systems and three record management systems. We are down to three finance and payroll systems. We are targeting 2020, when we move to Fremantle, to get down to one of everything. Changing IT systems is expensive and costly. There is no additional money, money is tight, so we are trying to manage this as an incremental process. There are multiple networks. There are all of those sorts of things. In some country towns we have got four separate offices in the town, so we are trying to rationalise office space and get people into the same building so they can work together. In some towns there are not offices big enough to house all the department. So, it is this understanding that this should be done step by step when opportunities arise and leases expire, rather than trying to put in a whole layer of cost of trying to terminate leases and those sorts of things. There is an ongoing program and we are trying to get that driven out of the regions rather than out of Perth.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Does the department then effectively have an implementation plan that would deliver a fully integrated, unified department by 2020? Would you be able to provide that to the committee?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will find out whether there is one. As to whether we can provide are not, I will check that with the minister, so I will take it on notice.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Thank you very much. I think the director general indicated that there was a plan.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I would be surprised if there was not; I would be concerned if there was not!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I think there is one. Minister, you would hope there is one, because if there is not I will be screaming blue murder. So, there is one and the minister will undertake to see whether or not they can be provided.

The CHAIR: Thanks for that information, member.

[Supplementary Information No C1.]

Hon TJORN SIBMA: There was a bit of confusion, Chair. I thought I was helping.

The CHAIR: There did not appear to be any confusion except what the number allocated was.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: The 2020 deadline, was that anticipated at the time that the machinery-of-government changes were announced?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I can say that at the time that the announcements were made the precise plans relevant to each particular grouping that was made under MOG, you know, the implementation time lines for each of them, were worked up by each of the respective new groupings, so I do not know that I can accurately say that at the time the Premier made the announcement it was in place

that in respect of particular grouping the implementation plan would go to 2020. I do not think I can say that. I do not know whether the director general can add anything more, but I suspect the announcement was made and then the work began as to how to best time line each implementation.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I would assume, yes, the director general is charged with implementing the policy direction by government; I am not a question that, because I know it will get me nowhere in these hearings. But nevertheless, you do not know the problems you inherit until you inherit them.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I know that!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Very good! Just to confirm, by the end of 2020 or the start of 2020, a fully integrated department—can I get an estimate?

Mr Searle: There are two different things. In terms of the start of 2020, I think it is March, will see us relocate to Fremantle and the idea behind the finance systems, HR systems and record-keeping systems is to have those integrated by the start of 2020, effectively. In terms of the operations of the department, we have got a rollout around the regions. The Kimberley has already started. Pilbara, goldfields and great southern are targeted for somewhere between March and July next year. The rest of the regional part of the state will be by the end of the next calendar year, and the metro areas are happening incrementally as well.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Through the reporting period, would you be able to provide an estimate of the cost of the implementation process? Is it possible to estimate that? If you cannot provide the data now, I am happy to take it on notice.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I might take it on notice.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: The follow-up then would be: because it is clear that there is an implementation schedule with a target date of 2020, with stages of delivery, could I understand how much that implementation plan will cost—I will not say “cost to implement”; it is a tautology?

Hon SUE ELLERY: We will take it on notice.

[Supplementary Information No C2.]

Hon TJORN SIBMA: With respect to that figure, is the intention here to generate or find resources internally or will you likely seek supplementation from the consolidated account?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will take it on notice, but, you know, these things might not have any costs attached to them. I will take that bit on notice.

[Supplementary Information No C3.]

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I will ask a more specific question then. Is any business plan being developed by the agency to seek additional funding or support for the implementation of the full MOG change?

Hon SUE ELLERY: If it is being done now, that is outside the reporting period, but in any event I will take the question on notice.

The CHAIR: We will just include all of that in C3. I will just make a general statement for the benefit of participating members in particular. The scope of these annual report hearings is the reporting period in the annual report; however, members can and have asked questions directly of the minister, and if the minister is available to provide those answers, I have let that go through. Just reminding members that this minister is a representative minister and as such does not have the full scope, full information, that she may have had in the previous hearing as the actual minister.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Correct; thank you, Madam Chair.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: One further question, because it relates directly to the machinery-of-government changes undertaken in the period that this report reports upon. Has the agency undertaken any sort of lessons-learned review of experiences to date?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will take that on notice and see what the minister is able to provide.

[Supplementary Information No C4.]

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Might the minister ask the director general who is sitting right next to her whether or not he has undertaken any of that work?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Honourable member, the questions go through the minister, and as a representative minister I will do my very best to make available information to the committee. If I think that as the minister myself I would want another minister representing me to check with me about something first, I will do that, and I will give the committee my genuine undertaking to take it on notice and to ask the minister to provide you with an answer.

The CHAIR: Let us be clear.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Whether or not the Department of Communities has undertaken a lessons-learned review or a review of that time in relation to experiences executing machinery-of-government changes.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I understood the question.

Hon DIANE EVERS: I just have one question in two parts. The committee tried to focus to be on key performance indicators and efficiency indicators, so that is what I will be looking at. On page 136, at the bottom of the page, there is the efficiency indicator of average cost per homelessness client. Noting that this has increased by about five or six per cent over the target into the current year, is there any reason that you know of why this may have happened?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will ask the director general to provide an answer or direct you to one of his officers. I make the point that I made, I think, in the hearing with the Art Gallery yesterday that it is hard, with KPIs when you are measuring the delivery of social services. It is fundamentally different to measuring the production of widgets. Government does its best effort, but it is a difficult thing to measure in any way that is absolutely precise. I will ask the director general to make some comment on that.

[3.20 pm]

Ms Pritchard: Basically, when you look at the dollars in the outputs that make up that indicator, the dollars remain static but the actual number of clients that have been reported from community sector organisations that are funded to provide those services has increased. It has led to a lower average cost for 2017–18.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Yes, I gathered that from the figures. That is part of my second question. The first question was: was there any reason for the higher-than-expected number of people homeless? Is there any particular area that you think that might have come from?

Ms Pritchard: The indicator relates to the homelessness services that we fund.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Yes. So the numbers of people —

Ms Pritchard: Those funded services have just seen a higher number of —

Hon DIANE EVERS: The other one, as you said, the figure is shown to be less even though the number of dollars has not changed that much. So my question then is: is this a reasonable efficiency indicator if, by the number of clients who are experiencing homelessness increases, the indicator appears to look better? It just does not lead to a —

Hon SUE ELLERY: If I may, it is not a measure of homelessness; it is a measure of the service delivery to homeless people. I would hope that —

Hon DIANE EVERS: I see.

Hon SUE ELLERY: — in fact we are providing better and more services to homeless people.

Hon DIANE EVERS: And that would not reflect that there are more people needing a home?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Not necessarily.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Thanks. That is all.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: I refer to page 62. There is a graph there at the bottom left of the page about “Family and domestic violence incidents with and without children in WA”. It is fantastic to see that that figure has dropped somewhat significantly, by 7.6 per cent. That is commendable. I was wondering if you could give us a breakdown of those incidents perhaps—I am happy to take it on notice if need be—a breakdown of how many of these cases are female on male, male on male, female on female, male on female, and if also that data is available for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cases.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Sure. I will ask the director general to find you someone who can make some comments. In terms of data on cases of violence and the gender make-up and the Indigenous or non-Indigenous make-up, you might want to direct that question to police as well. In terms of incidents that they are called to, their data on that would be useful. I also make the point there has been an enormous amount of research done over the years which does indicate that the vast majority—forgive me if I do not remember the percentage—of family and domestic violence is by a male perpetrator known to a female victim and children victims. There is all sorts of research that shows that. I might ask the director general if there is someone who can provide some additional commentary.

Mr Searle: The best source of data is the police because they have the right data. The problem I have, I must say with these graphs, is these are about reported cases of domestic violence. It is not necessarily a true indicator of the amount of domestic violence going on within our communities. I just think we need to be really careful when we look at these sorts of numbers.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Can I ask a quick clarifying question before you continue? Are the numbers presented here based on numbers given to you by police or are these based on incidents you are aware of for services delivered to victims of domestic violence?

Hon SUE ELLERY: This agency funds—I will get them to explain in a minute how they do it—services who provide care and assistance and support to victims of family and domestic violence. I will get them to explain that a bit.

Ms Nys: The data does come to the Department of Communities from the police. That is actually the recorded number of domestic violence incident reports and we get that information directly from the police.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Thank you. Just on this, minister, you have already mentioned that obviously the vast majority of cases are male on female and that the perpetrator is known to the victim of course, but I am concerned, even if maybe a niche group within the cohort of victims of domestic violence, what services are available for male victims? I am not trying to make some kind of narrative here of female perpetrators against male; I am actually concerned about male on male domestic violence. In terms of male victims of domestic violence, male on male is more common than female on male. I am wondering what services are available there. When I look at the public website for the Department of Communities and when I look at the helpline available for women’s

domestic violence, it is very clearly described as “victims of domestic violence; women call this number”. If I look at the website that has the men’s domestic violence helpline, it is very clearly aimed at perpetrators of domestic violence. There is a line at the end of the blurb that says, “Information and support is also available for men who have experienced family and domestic violence” but it is at the bottom of the blurb. If I was a victim of domestic violence, whether the perpetrator was male or female, and I looked at this website, I would think, “That’s not for me; that’s for the perpetrators”, in which case there is probably no service for me at all. When I look at the various fact sheets that there are links to on that website, all the fact sheets that provide information and tips and helpful guides are all for perpetrators of domestic violence—the ones that are aimed at men. I am wondering what support services are there for male victims, regardless of the gender or sex of the perpetrator? If you could explain that to me, that would be much appreciated.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will get one of the officers to provide you with some detail in a moment. I know from my own personal experience as a member of Parliament dealing with constituents that there are organisations who support the gay community who are commissioning research and who are advocating on behalf of male-on-male and female-on-female family and domestic violence. I know that. Whether there are services funded by government, I do not know. I will ask one of the officers to explain what is available for those people, but I certainly am aware of organisations in our community who are providing support, if not 24-hour residential services, to victims of that kind of family and domestic violence. I will ask the director general if there is someone that can provide more information.

Mr Searle: I think we would rather take that on notice and give a detailed response. I do, however, take notice of your concern about the way the website is set out. I am really happy to undertake to review that and see if there is a better way to do it.

[Supplementary Information No C5.]

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: That is great.

I do note there was a Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence and it made a couple of recommendations specifically for male victims around their support agency being the main source of assistance for male victims and around their support agency and other relevant support services developing arrangements to ensure male victims get help. But in their conclusions they also said —

The Commission concluded that, although resources should not be diverted from women and children, who constitute the majority of victims, the family violence system needs to respond more supportively to male victims of family violence.

I would be very keen to see the response you can give us there and what the department can do to ensure that there is, I suppose, equal treatment of victims of domestic violence regardless of the gender of the perpetrator or victim.

The CHAIR: We will include all of that in C5.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: In answer to question 3 prior to the hearing, the Minister for Child Protection said that the Department of Communities issued three negative notices —

Hon SUE ELLERY: Can I interrupt you? Would you be able to give us a copy; I do not have a copy of that in front of me?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: None of the witnesses have a copy?

Hon SUE ELLERY: They might.

The CHAIR: They might have but —

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I think they are here to assist you.

In answer to question 3 prior to the hearing, the Minister for Child Protection said that the Department of Communities issued three negative notices to the Department of Health, yet when I asked the same question to the Minister for Health, he said that the department had received zero. What is the point of issuing negative notices if they are not being received?

Hon SUE ELLERY: The second part of the question—I guess I will ask the director general to respond to whether there is a discrepancy between the numbers. In respect to the actual question “What is the point?”, there is a serious point to the collection of that data and the numbers ought to add up. I will try to find an explanation for you as to why they did not. I will ask Mr Jolly.

[3.30 pm]

Mr Jolly: Thanks, minister, and thanks, member, for the question. The member is quite right that there are variations in data that is reported from the working with children screening unit and some individual employers of people who are engaged in child-related work. We have likewise seen a similar sort of anomaly in the reporting between the department and the Department of Education. The variances typically arise because the same question can be answered from a couple of different perspectives. If you ask the working with children screening unit to provide information about negative notices issued for people who are employed by a particular organisation, they will work to the definition of “child-related employment” that is incorporated in the working with children act, which includes people who are in paid employment and people who act as volunteers and people who are students. Often other agencies and employing organisations will respond probably in the stricter industrial term of people who are in paid employment, so you can often receive a variation for those sorts of reasons. You might also find at the point in time that a person applies for a working with children check that subsequently results in a negative notice—they are required to apply prior to engaging in child-related work. It is sometimes the case that a prospective employer becomes aware of a criminal history prior to the point of engaging that person in employment and it may well be that the negative notice is issued and they are actually not subsequently employed by that organisation. I am not sure if that is making sense. So, on the first hand, they signal their intention to be employed by that organisation, but that employment never arises for one of a combination of reasons.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: If you take a look at the question that I asked, I said: how many negative notices were issued to employees in the Department of Health? The answer is that three negative notices were issued to the Department of Health. That is the answer from your minister, signed by your minister. Yet when I ask Health, they say zero. Will the minister undertake to urgently resolve this systemic breakdown of communication?

Hon SUE ELLERY: No, I am not going to accept the pejorative language. What I will do is take it up with the relevant Minister for Child Protection and ask her to reconcile the differences in the two sets of numbers. That will involve her having a conversation with the Minister for Health.

The CHAIR: We will take the reporting back of that from the minister as supplementary information.

[*Supplementary Information No C6.*]

Hon NICK GOIRAN: In answer to question 5 prior to the hearings, the minister tabled documents and referred to them as “attachment A”. How many documents were included in attachment A?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Honourable member, will you just bear with me, because the document I have in front of me does not have the numbers?

The CHAIR: It is not an official document, so we will take the committee’s document for that.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: You have just been provided a copy.

The CHAIR: That is not an official one; that is my copy of those. I would rather the committee provide the minister with them.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: It was provided by the department. The department provided a document to the committee entitled “Attachment A”.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I have a document entitled “Attachment A: Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations 2017–18 Annual Report Hearings: Attachment A—Question 5”. I have that in front of me.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: In the answer to question 5, it says “see attachment A”. My question is: how many documents were included in attachment A when they were sent by the minister to the committee?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am not sure that I am able to answer that. I can take it on notice. It would have been sent by the minister’s office, so I am not sure there is anyone here who can answer that.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Take it on notice; that is fine.

The CHAIR: Sorry, member; could you just be very clear about what it is that you are asking, because the advisory officer is not here?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The response says “see attachment A”. I want to know, as part of attachment A, how many documents were sent by the department or by the minister to the committee.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Does the honourable member think there is a discrepancy?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I do not know.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Do you think a document has gone missing?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Who would know?

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: How many documents does the honourable member think are in attachment A?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: What I have been provided is three. One will never know if it is more than three unless the minister or the department tell us if they sent more than three or not.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will take it on notice, but I do not understand where the questioner is going. Do you think documents went missing between the minister’s office and the committee?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Minister, it is in response to a question of: how many documents were prepared at briefings? Earlier in the answers —

Hon SUE ELLERY: That is different.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: No, it is not. It is in respect to the same issue. The minister says that she attended 20 briefings and three documents were provided, so I want to know whether we have been provided all the briefing documents or not. Maybe the minister has given the committee 20 documents—I do not know—but I have seen three.

The CHAIR: The question is: how many documents did the minister send? I also suspect that the member’s question should be directed to the committee, too, if the member thinks there is a discrepancy in the number of documents.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I am simply asking the witnesses who are here, and the committee members are not witnesses.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I now understand the context that the honourable member is asking about. I do not know the answer. I can tell you from my own experience as a minister that I am briefed daily by my staff about all sorts of things and, probably more relevant to your question, by agency staff about all sorts of things verbally. It does not mean every briefing generates a document.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Agreed. The documents that are in attachment A reveal that on 17 November last year, the minister knew there were 216 victims, and then on 12 December 2017, the minister knew the number had increased to 224. Why, then, did the minister tell Parliament last month that the number of child victims was 42?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will ask Mr Searle to provide an answer.

Mr Searle: I thank the member for the question. The issue about Operation Fledermaus in particular was that it was an ongoing police investigation. At various stages in the investigation, there were a number of alleged victims, and the number of alleged victims changed as the investigations continued—they went up and down over the course of the study. The final figure that we have reported is the number of victims where the perpetrator has been charged. There were 50 victims where the perpetrator was charged. Of those, 42 were still under the age of 18 and therefore they are included in our numbers.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: If there is a victim who is not the subject of a charge, they might still be considered an at-risk child. That would be of interest to the department—true?

Mr Searle: True.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So when the minister says that the department is aware of the names, ordinary residential locations and school enrolment status of all child victims identified during Operation Fledermaus, does that include those victims who are not subject to charges?

Mr Geddes: Where we would have that information, yes, but where a young person might come to the attention of the operation but we do not know the address—the family has moved or we just simply have not been provided with that information at that time—we may not. It is only through the course of further investigation that we may be able to locate that, but where there is a substantiation, and certainly where there has been a charge laid, of those 42 that were identified, we had that information.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: How many do we know the ordinary residential address of? Is it 42, is it 216, 224, 184? What is the actual number?

[3.40 pm]

Mr Searle: The reality is that we deal with way more children than this, so there are a number of children in that community where we know their residential address, their normal school and their full circumstances. The challenge through this whole process has been how we integrate our operations with the police operations. Since the first quarter of this year, we have had staff situated within a police station at Karratha so that integration has been as close as we can possibly make it, so that we know we have been engaged with every child that the police engage with on an ongoing basis. In the next month, I think it is, we are setting up a similar thing in Hedland because this investigation is expanding as police find linkages between one thing and another. So we are actively engaged with police, we are actively engaged with the children and, more particularly, we are actively engaged with the community in recognising that this is a whole-of-community challenge for that part of the Pilbara.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Are any of the six child perpetrators who are still attending school at the same school as one of their victims?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am not sure, honourable member, that the Department of Communities could answer that question.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: They do know because the briefing note tells us that they know that.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Honourable member, I will see if Grahame Searle can provide that information but you might like to direct that to the Minister for Education and Training, which of course, you already have.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: No, I asked you that in the last hearing and you said that the Department of Education is not told that information; it is the Department of Communities. That is why I am asking it now.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Okay; I will see if we can give you an answer.

Mr Searle: My expectation would be that there are children who are at the same school because there are not a lot of schools in Roebourne, so it is reasonable to assume that there are. What I am sure about is that we would work very closely with the Department of Education and police to make sure that there are safety plans in place for each of the children concerned. There are a number of things the education department has put in place around greater supervision of playgrounds and greater supervision of toileting processes within the schools—the toilets are locked at certain times and teachers inspect them regularly. A range of things have been put in place in terms of safety plans to make sure that all children are as safe as we can make them.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: You say that it is your expectation; is that an indication that we need to take on notice what the actual answer is? The question is: are any of the six perpetrators still at a school with one of their victims?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Can you answer that question now?

Mr Geddes: No, we could not answer that question now. As per Grahame's comment, yes, the expectation is that where you may have a community that has one school and you are managing those kinds of relationships, then you would put in the safety plan with those elements that Grahame has suggested. We also have now three psychologists in the Pilbara area that would work with the young people at the schools et cetera that would help develop that safety plan. In terms of that direct answer and numbers right now, we do not have that answer.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: But you could get it?

Hon SUE ELLERY: We could take it on notice.

[Supplementary Information No C7.]

The CHAIR: Could we just have a summary of the data?

Hon SUE ELLERY: We are taking on notice the question from the honourable member, which is: can the Department of Communities confirm or otherwise that of the six child perpetrators, are they at the same school as their victims?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Minister, I refer to the answers prior to hearings to question 4 regarding carer standard of care assessments, which revealed that approximately 80 per cent of cases were not completed within the designated time frame. Can the department identify a reason why an overwhelming number of case assessments are not being met within the stipulated time frame?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Can I ask Ms Tang to provide an answer to that.

Ms Tang: Thank you, minister, and, yes, they are overdue. When we talk about standard of care assessments, we are talking about the relatively low level concerns around the standard of care. For some of these matters, they may be issues raised within a family environment where a child is

placed, which may relate to discipline or they may relate to how a single issue is dealt with. It is really about how we work with that family. If there were any concerns of risk, high-risk—certainly, there would be a different action. I accept that it is not acceptable that time lines have gone over. Those time lines are set by the department. When we are looking at working with families, we do have to take into account moving at the pace of the carers and of the child. So when we are trying to make those assessments, we are doing them in the best interests of the child. If we rush those assessments, if we actually, in a sense, disturb that relationship, which may ultimately mean we have to place that child somewhere else if the carers do not wish to continue with that, we need to balance that against the risk. If the risk is seen to be high, we obviously will act and either place that child temporarily in another place or permanently, or alternatively, we will work with the family. If it takes a little bit longer than 30 days, then that is what we need to do. Distance is also an issue if the carers are not available or we are not able to get to them, but obviously we would always try to meet the deadlines to make sure that the time lines are met. The important thing here is that we have set the time lines. If we drive the time lines, we might have an unintended consequence that we are making a decision which is against the interests of the child, although we have satisfied an administrative time line. That is what we have to guard against all the time.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I agree with you. The extra point, though, is that there is the capacity to seek an extension, yet when I look at the information that is provided—I will take the district of Armadale as an example—there were 10 cases and in all 10 cases, they were late with no extension. If I compare that to Cannington, there were 22 cases and four of them had an extension but were still late anyway and the other 18 were late and there was no extension. It seems that the process of applying for an extension needs review.

Ms Tang: Through the minister, one, does the process need a review? Clearly, there would be a discussion and there has already been discussions around time lines and keeping in line with those processes so that we are not arguing a point about whether we have kept 10 days over or 12 days over, but whether we have made a decision that is correct for the child at the time. Because what happens is that things get in the way of actually saying whether the child is safe or not, or whether it has been done properly. Really what I am saying to my district directors, and no doubt my colleague in regional and remote is saying the same, is that we need to make sure that those processes are in place. When they are not and we cannot do it in the time line, you need to seek the approvals because this gets in the way of really the real business of what we are all focused on—that is, the safety of children.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Would there be information as to what was the longest time that it took to do a carer standard of care assessment in the reporting period?

Ms Tang: I presume we could take that on notice. As an addition to that, I know that we have looked at those ones which are overdue and I would suggest that at least over 90 per cent are now done within the reporting period—they have been checked to say that they have been done. That is something we undertook to do and part of that was the discussion with the district directors and staff around the importance of keeping within process and keeping in time with those processes.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Was there one that stood out at you? Did you think, “Gee, that’s a very long period of time; it was 300 days and it should have been 30 days” or something?

Ms Tang: I do not have that detail before me. I just know that there was a review of whether they had been completed; since the annual report information was done, what was the completion of those assessments subsequent to that data being completed?

[Supplementary Information No C8.]

Hon PIERRE YANG: I refer to page 41 on family and domestic violence. I have a question following on from the question from Hon Aaron Stonehouse about the services available for male victims. I would like to know what culturally appropriate services are available to culturally and linguistically diverse communities. More importantly, how are these services promoted in the culturally and linguistically diverse communities, given that if you cannot go onto the internet, do not know English, and you are a refugee or of a new migrant background, you would not know of the existence of these services? I would like to ask for an answer to that question.

[3.50 pm]

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will ask Ms Nys to provide a response to that.

Ms Nys: There are a number of service providers who are contracted specifically to provide programs and outreach services to people from different culturally and linguistically diverse populations. I cannot name them off the top of my head, but I could provide that information if required, but I do know that we contract specifically with some of the multicultural peak organisations and service providers for that purpose. Both organisations operate solely in the domestic violence space, but also organisations such as Multicultural Women's Council provide a whole range of services, but they also provide advice around domestic violence to the communities that they engage with.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Perhaps we could take on notice a provision of a list of the services. For the honourable member's information, I am certainly aware in the south east metropolitan area, a range of, if I can call them, generic in absolutely non-generic services make a point of employing people from different cultural backgrounds to provide services to people in that geographic area. But I will take on notice the provision of a list of contracted services that provide services to CALD victims of family and domestic violence.

The CHAIR: That is CALD-specific services as distinct from mainstream services with a CALD focus or worker.

[*Supplementary Information No C9.*]

Hon PIERRE YANG: Perhaps, Madam Chair, following on from that, if the response could also contain how the promotion in the CALD communities is done and what kind of peak bodies the department has an arrangement with for the promotion of such services, I think that will be very helpful.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes.

Hon PIERRE YANG: I refer to page 40. The policy of Target 120 was announced in May. Can I please ask where we are at with this policy right now and what has been put in place?

The CHAIR: Member, no. The minister is the representative minister, so we are trying to ask questions within the reporting period. But if the minister is able to answer, she will.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will ask the director general whether he can make some comments about that and we might be able to provide you with more information offline if we do not give you what you want.

Mr Searle: Target 120 is a really interesting project and it fundamentally tries to change the way a state government will engage with young people who are basically on the verge of the criminal justice system. We have worked very closely with a range of departments, particularly Health, Justice, Treasury and Police, to work our way through the issues involved in identifying the cohort of children who are most likely to benefit from this sort of project in terms of both their age profile and their histories and have identified children in both Armadale and Bunbury—and they are the first two sites where this is being rolled out. There have been coordinators appointed. There are

some delays in delivering a broader IT system to support this, but we now have people on the ground linking up the services to get the services aligned so we are ready for the young people. That process has started, and particularly in Armadale, we are confident that it will be up and running with the first children engaged this calendar year.

Hon PIERRE YANG: Is there any development in the South Metropolitan Region? I know that Armadale is not far away from the South Metropolitan Region, which is my electorate, but is there any update?

Mr Searle: The first two are Bunbury and Armadale. So in Armadale, because there is better existing service coverage, we think we will be delivering earlier. In Bunbury, we are actually going to have to go out and find service providers to provide some of the services. Once those two sites are up and running and we are starting to get some confidence that the process works and get some evidence, we will then be expanding it out. My guess is the next site will probably be in the north west of the state.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I am mindful that I am asking questions about what is coming, but based on the report, I refer to page 9 and specifically the review of the Children and Community Services Act, which I know was tabled about a year ago. I am aware that that was a very comprehensive review. It notes in the report that the state government is considering the recommendations. Can I please ask: when will we know which of these recommendations are supported by government and are likely to be actioned?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will take it on notice. I am not sure that I can guarantee that you will get an answer, because if it is still before government, we might not be in a position where we are ready to make that announcement. But I will take the request on notice.

[Supplementary Information No C10.]

Hon ALISON XAMON: I refer then to page 40 and the development of the at-risk youth action plan. Again, I would like to know when is that plan likely to be finalised.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will ask Ms Nys if she can make some comments about that.

Ms Nys: I can make some comments. The plan is being consulted with and developed at the moment, so we are actually in consultation at this point in time. Those consultations are being run with partner organisations, the lead one of which is the Youth Affairs Council of WA. We are doing statewide consultation in relation to specific targeted services for at-risk youth. That will lead to the development of a renewed strategy and then, ultimately, to some proposals in relation to funding distribution. So a time line for full implementation is we are looking at 2019.

Hon ALISON XAMON: So you actually touched on part of my question, which was who was being consulted. It is good to see that YACWA is playing a key role. I am happy to take it on notice. Would I be able to get a rundown of the full extent of that consultation?

Ms Nys: Absolutely.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Great; thank you.

The CHAIR: Minister?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes; that is fine.

[Supplementary Information No C11.]

Hon ALISON XAMON: Again, I refer to page 41, regarding the development of a 10-year strategy to reduce family and domestic violence. Noting that it is going to be built on current initiatives so that

we have a more integrated approach, can I please ask: what other agencies are involved in the development of this strategy?

Hon SUE ELLERY: We can probably provide some information. I will ask Ms Nys if she can give you some of that.

Ms Nys: The first stage of the development of the strategy was actually a cross-government and cross-sector policy consortium, which essentially took place over a number of weeks to identify the issues which we then wanted to take out for wider discussion. Off the top of my head, I would not be able to name all the members, but they have representatives from the Department of Education, Department of Justice, Communities; a number of Aboriginal organisations, as well as a number of Aboriginal leaders; the police were there—so all the key agencies—and also a number of academics, so people who are not from government to advise on best practice and what we knew.

Hon ALISON XAMON: When are you anticipating that that strategy might be finalised?

Ms Nys: We are anticipating that strategy will be finalised towards the end of next year. So the next stage is doing some targeted consultation, particularly with the Aboriginal community and Aboriginal women, and then some statewide consultation.

Hon ALISON XAMON: So 2020 is looking to be the year for the rollout of those strategies; is that right?

Ms Nys: Yes.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Ultimately, that will be a decision of government, but I understand that is the anticipated plan.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I refer to page 43 and support services for grandcarers. I understand that the department is currently undertaking a review of the programs which are provided to grandcarers. Can I please ask what is the time frame for that review; and, like the other questions, who has been consulted in that review?

[4.00 pm]

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am getting blank looks, so I am going to take that on notice and see what information we can provide you.

Hon ALISON XAMON: No-one here knows what is happening with the grandcarers review?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I just looked around and nobody stuck their hand up, so I am saying to you, I will take it on notice.

[*Supplementary Information No C12.*]

Hon ALISON XAMON: It is hard to get there. I am whacking through the questions because it is hard to get the answers.

Hon SUE ELLERY: With respect, you are asking about something beyond the reporting period, which I am happy to provide for you. I do not think it is unreasonable that I take it on notice.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I am happy to take it on notice, because I do want to have a comprehensive answer, but I do note that it has also received a bit of attention, publicly as well, so I am a bit surprised that there are no answers for this. It is not a particularly obscure question.

The CHAIR: Just for the benefit of participating members, I will say it again: departments come prepared to provide information based on the reporting period, which is the annual report. That we extend those questions, and for the most part they are answered, particularly in this hearing, is a

bonus. I will continue to allow those questions, but noting that members should not have the expectation that they all can individually be answered.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I refer to page 48 and the Aboriginal in-home support service. Can I please ask: what are the performance indicators for this contract?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will ask Ms Tang.

Ms Tang: I do not have the specifics of those performance indicators. They are clearly in the contract—I do not have them before me—but one of the processes that we are currently undertaking is the evaluation plan of the success of that program. That will obviously take into account the elements of the contract. In the contract, when Wungening Moort put through their bid, they included elements of that in relation to what will be evaluated in the end. That process is, in effect, a co-design with Wungening Moort around what are the differences they believe they can make, what are the differences we—that is still being finalised with Wungening Moort.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Do you have an expected time frame for when that might be finalised?

Ms Tang: The evaluation plan?

Hon ALISON XAMON: Yes.

Ms Tang: I understand it is in process. I actually have a meeting arranged to speak with the person who is heading up that evaluation plan. I have frequent discussions with Wungening Moort around the work that they are doing. I am aware that they are engaged in that evaluation process. From their perspective, I know it is happening, and I have also arranged to meet with—whilst the contract is managed through commissioning contracts and commissioning and sector engagement, because it is in the metropolitan area and we are working directly with Wungening Moort because of the services they are providing, I take a specific interest in that, obviously, wanting to know that it is succeeding both on the ground as it is happening but also as a program itself.

Hon ALISON XAMON: How are the families who receive this particular support identified?

Ms Tang: They are identified at the districts as either children and families who may be at risk of entering care or who may be in care and looking at reunification. When the contract was first awarded, I know for myself, I went to the majority of the districts in the metropolitan area—that is where it covers—talking to districts about the importance of working with Wungening Moort, the type of families. Not only are we asking Wungening Moort to work with families, the clear message to district staff is that this is not a matter where you refer, expect Wungening Moort to fix the family and send the family back to child protection services. I know I am stating that, but that is a clear view, because it is not only the services they are providing to families, but it is the manner in which they work. The cultural ways in which they work with family and the expectation that child protection staff will work in partnership and alongside Wungening Moort with families. Those referrals come through. Head office works with the districts. What we are also understanding with Wungening Moort, there are, obviously, meetings with contract staff, there are meetings with service delivery. I recently had a meeting with Wungening Moort and we were talking about the positives and the negatives about the current implementation, because it is so important to all of us for Wungening Moort to succeed, for the department to have a successful contract, but ultimately for families to have a culturally appropriate service which they see as of value to them and to their families. It is not a contract which sits over there. It is well and truly sitting in front of us to how that is being implemented.

Hon ALISON XAMON: A final question in relation to this particular service: is it too early or are you able to give an indication of how many families already are utilising this service or benefiting through this service? I am happy to take it on notice.

Ms Tang: I can take it on notice. Probably for accuracy, I would prefer to take it on notice, but, a number of families.

Hon SUE ELLERY: We will do that.

[Supplementary Information No C13.]

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: It was a big reporting period in terms of national royal commissions, and I notice that we just scrape into the reporting period; thank you for making the government response on 27 June. I am looking at page 50 and there is, I think, understandably, a relatively brief account of the state's likely role in responding to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. First of all, given that we see there that Communities is the lead agency for about one-third of the recommendations, that is a huge responsibility to take on, I wondered if we could talk a bit about how that is going to be resourced.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will hand over to Helen Nys in a moment, but I just make the point that this is an across-government response, which numerous agencies are contributing to and have been allocated certain responsibilities that they need to pursue in implementing the government's response. I will ask Helen to walk you through the leadership role that the department is playing.

Ms Nys: Yes, obviously, the state government did announce its response to the royal commission in June 2018, and, as you said, the Department of Communities is one of the lead agencies for about two-thirds of the recommendations. In terms of actually the framework for delivering and monitoring the implementation of recommendations, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, with input from Communities, has lead responsibility for an implementation framework, and also for the provision of an annual report for the state's response to the royal commission. That report will be delivered later this year for the government.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Can I just interrupt you there? I think the report says 104 out of 310, which is about one-third.

Ms Nys: Yes, not a majority. Apologies.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Yes. I just wanted to check I was not reading it wrong, thank you.

Ms Tang: It just feels that way.

Ms Nys: It does, yes.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Yes, I am sure.

Ms Nys: There is a significant other that we are not lead agency, but we have significant partnerships with.

The implementation framework really articulates the performance priorities and who the lead agencies are for each of those recommendations. It is a lengthy spreadsheet. Also, there have been discussions in relation to the areas which will be prioritised for implementation and response first. We have responsibility for seven areas including child-safe standards, harmful sexual behaviours and the screening of adults who work with children or care for children. They are the three priority areas that, for our minister, we are concentrating on in the first instance.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Is it appropriate for us to ask, on notice, to have a list of the seven? Did you say there were seven areas designated?

Ms Nys: Yes, I am able to give them to you now. Starting at the top again: to ensure that all institutions implement child-safe standards; to improve responses to harmful sexual behaviours in children; to improve screening of adults who work with or care for children; to improve preventions against child sexual abuse in high-risk environments and amongst vulnerable populations; to improve information sharing between institutions across the states; to make institutions more accountable through improved recording and reporting; and to improve advocacy, treatment and support for survivors of child sexual abuse.

[4.10 pm]

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: So you are saying the minister has prioritised three of those?

Ms Nys: In the first instance.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Thank you. I wonder if, following on from that, you could tell us how you are working with existing oversight agencies in the state? I recognise that these specific questions can be directed to those agencies, so I am thinking just in general, but the children's commissioner, OICS, the Ombudsman et cetera. I am interested in the way Communities is engaging with those other oversight bodies.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Ms Nys and then Ms Tang can provably provide you with some information.

Ms Nys: The Department of the Premier and Cabinet leads implementation, so there is an implementation group, which is attended by all agencies. That meets on a regular basis to monitor tracking against the various recommendations that need to be implemented. Each of those recommendations in a sense has a working plan underneath it, so we are working very closely with the Commissioner for Children and Young People, for example, in the child-safe standards where, actually, they are leading on that work and we are one of the agencies that works very closely alongside them. That is just one example. Each recommendation has a work program underneath it, so it is quite clearly laid out what the expectations are and who is responsible for doing what.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Ms Tang might want to add something.

Ms Tang: In relation to the question about how we are working with other agencies and sectors, we have an ongoing relationship with the Ombudsman in relation to child deaths. We obviously work with the coroner and also with the children's commissioner. In relation to that, we felt that up, until now, that relationship had been fairly disjointed across those agencies and how we needed to be much more focused on how we were working. So we actually have set up a small team, which is actually existing resources, called the central review team. In that way we are able to look at recommendations that come in from the Ombudsman around child deaths, also domestic violence deaths and much more, to be able to build that relationship, but also talk much more clearly and articulate what we are trying to do in this space, as far as reform around how we are trying to do improved signs of safety work within the districts and how we are trying to improve on the recommendations that they have made over time. Whilst it is not specifically related to the royal commission, what it is doing is building a much stronger relationship and credibility between our two areas of work, so that when these matters come to fruition and they are being introduced, we are not starting from a negative base; we are actually building that relationship and showing that we actually have an across-community response to how we work with the children's commissioner and with the Ombudsman and the coroner. That gives you some picture of not seeing it as something over on the side; we actually need to look at the trends that have happened across various cases and build that knowledge alongside the royal commission information about how we approach our work generally across the department.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Which may go back to that concept of bringing bits together that you talked about at the beginning of the hearing.

Not unconnected to the whole question about the rollout of the recommendations of the royal commission, digging down into some of the financials at the back of the report, there is a section on page 77 and page 145 on children in secure care. I wondered if you could help us. I draw your attention specifically to page 145—actually, the chart starts on page 144. Can you talk us through that data that is there, which shows that the result for 2017–18 was higher than the target, yet the days have substantially decreased? I wonder if you can just talk us through that. The days per child in secure care has decreased.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Ms Pritchard.

Ms Pritchard: The indicator shows the average cost per placement day for our secure care facility.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Which is Kath French?

Ms Pritchard: The Kath French Secure Care Centre, yes. During the year, we had reduced the capacity in the centre due to renovations, so the number of placement days recorded in our child protection system was substantially lower than what we had initially budgeted for. We initially budgeted for 1 600 placement days and we achieved only 1 172, so that led to the variance in the efficiency measure.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Have the renovations finished now?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am not aware of where they are at.

Ms Tang: Yes, they are. The other note within the annual report also refers to reduction in referrals because, certainly, the decision to refer to secure care is something that cannot be taken lightly. We need to look at every other alternative. It is really a service which we do not want to use or should not have to. We do not want to use that but at times we need to, so it must be left to those who are in greatest need of which there is no alternative service for them. So the fact that there is a reduction in numbers or the fact that it is not fully utilised is a positive thing because I know the discussions—and Andrew is most close to this—with district directors is very much around: why are you making this referral? It is not about respite for you or for somewhere else; it is absolutely in the best interests of the child to make a decision such as that, which is an administrative decision, is absolutely the last resort that we should consider.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: I am interested in your language there. Is Kath French a place where children go to receive services or is it a place they go when they are awaiting placement with another service?

Ms Tang: To my knowledge, the placement is at times they are there because they are a particular risk to themselves or to others. It is not a criminal placement; it is not Banksia. They go there and there are therapeutic services within secure care provided by staff and then because they are only there for 21 days and may get an extension for a further 21 days, there is not a huge amount of work you can do. It is almost like a circuit-breaker for that young person and then the full effort is on, from the day the young person goes into secure care, how they exit that into a service which supports them into the community and not having to return. It really is, as I say, a therapeutic community within itself and then it is a transition to those services, if they are available in the community for that young person.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: What is the current renovated bed capacity of Kath French?

Mr Geddes: Six. It was not the number that changed; it was actually just that the building takes a fair whack, for want of a better term.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Is six its maximum capacity?

Ms Tang: Yes.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Do you keep data on how long each child spends there? I am sure you do.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I think you are required to, are you not?

Ms Tang: Yes; the systems are little clunky, the extent to which we can draw that out as a report is my hesitation.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: I would like to take that as a question on notice if I could. Can you see what data you have? Twenty-one days is a stipulated maximum, is it? Is it a statutory maximum?

Ms Tang: Yes, then there is an option for 21, but if a child comes in and they are responding well, we can reduce that time. So it is not just 21 and that is it. If they are responding well, you would not want to keep them in for that period of time.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: That is great, if you could give me what you can.

Mr Geddes: You can only do one extension. If the second extension is only given for 10 days, it is not that you can go for 42 days, it is simply those two terms.

[*Supplementary Information No C14.*]

Hon TJORN SIBMA: My questions pertain to the information presented on page 62 of the annual report concerning the number of children in care. I note that in the reporting period, we registered a pretty unsatisfactory result of more than 5 000 children under the care of the CEO. The composition is there and this is not intended to be unnecessarily open-ended, but have we seen the peak of this situation? What are your projections for growth, particularly in the composition of Aboriginal children in care?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will get the director general and perhaps other officers to make a comment. If I may on behalf of government and as a former Minister for Child Protection, that is a fraught question because on the one hand, greater intervention is actually a good thing where intervention is required, and we should not step away from intervening if we think a child is in an unsafe environment.

There is the legacy of the stolen generations that for a period of time some people might have been accused of overcompensating; that time has long passed, I might add. It is not necessarily a bad thing for the state to intervene to keep children safe, but on the other hand, as a community it is not a good reflection on all of us if children are unsafe, so it is about addressing what it is that causes them to go into care. I might ask Jackie Tang to make some further comment as well.

[4.20 pm]

Ms Tang: I agree entirely that the number itself does not tell you a lot. If, in fact, there should be 10 000 kids in care because they are at risk, then we have only half the kids in care. If there should be half the number, then that is about our threshold. The number is certainly an indicator. The percentage of Aboriginal children sits at 55 per cent against a small pool of roughly just under 10 per cent of youth within WA. It is a concerning number, but at the same time, if those children are deemed not to be safe, we need to intervene.

Minister, if I could talk briefly about the central intake service we do now? The central intake team commenced on 1 July, the same day as the department and the same day as I did, actually, so I remember it well! In the metropolitan area, all notifications for concerns about children at risk go through the central intake team. That team has a threshold, a series of questions that were asked, and also the ability to do professional overrides. Not everyone can sit down, do the questionnaire and come up with an answer; it still needs that professional response. There is now a consistent

threshold that does not rely on going to one district, as was the case. You might go to Mirrabooka and see the duty officers there and you might undertake a safety and wellbeing assessment, whereas if you went to Fremantle, maybe you got a different decision. Across the metropolitan areas there is now a consistent threshold as to whether a child is taken into care—I should correct that; it is whether the decision is made to do a further assessment as to whether a child is considered to be at risk to bring into care.

Another benefit is that if a child is deemed not to need that additional assessment, they will be referred off to a family support network or other agency, so a family may be spoken to to discuss what their circumstances are and what might give rise to that risk, and they may be referred off to a service that can assist them. That is really important, because as soon as we capture young people into the child protection system, similar to the justice system, as soon as they come in, it is really difficult to get them out again. We have to have services that are available, are supportive to families and that divert appropriately so we do not then have the interventions.

The Peel region is now sitting within the metropolitan responsibility and by the end of the year we will also bring Peel into the metropolitan threshold tool. The other districts across the whole state have started being trained in the threshold tool. They are principally applying the same thresholds as children come to the attention of the district. Whether that sees a reduction or an increase in future reporting, because we are in fact making more effective assessments, time will tell.

The other aspect would like to add is that when you look at the numbers and it looks like a cumulative adding-on of numbers, it looks like we are just bringing children in and never sending them home. Roughly just under 1 000 children return home each year, so the processing through, when you see those numbers, you do not see the work that Child Protection staff do every day to reunite children back with their families, which is absolutely their job. Their job is to say, “Should they be reunified safely? If they can’t be reunified safely, then where is the next best permanent placement for them?” As I say, just under 1 000 children are returning to a safer environment. We might have a young person or child with us for a week, or we may have them until 18 years of age. This picture really just looks like we are going out and bringing in children; in fact, there is a whole complexity behind that, and yes, it is acknowledged that 55 per cent Aboriginal children is very high. If you are looking at the small population of Aboriginal communities, then for the reasons that you need to bring children into care—half the children are actually back in with family care in any event, which is hidden in here—it is also that it is a small pool in which to place children back into. Aboriginal children are tending to stay longer in the system because of the ability to place them back into a safe environment.

That is a long way to answer that that picture probably does not really demonstrate the complexities and work that is done to really work with families along the continuum of child protection.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: That was a fantastic answer—probably the most informative and expansive contribution made by a witness in the last two days of hearings, so thank you very much.

Ms Tang: That makes up for being late!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I do not want to concern the rest of the precious hearing time with editorialising the answers provided, but I just want to acknowledge that that was an informative response. I make this point because the data presented in annual reports is generally dreadful—it provides misleading avenues of inquiry or obscures other, more interesting facts.

Just by way of supplementary questions, you will have to take these on notice: for the present reporting period, could I please have the proportionality of referrals to children in care—I do not know the terminology to use—I suppose the ratio of children who have come to the department for

referral and then have ended up being recommended for placement in a care situation? So, effectively, if you get 18 000 notifications or thereabouts a year —

Mr Searle: We have an answer.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Oh, fabulous.

Ms Tang: This was literally done today; it is done each year, but is not necessarily publicised. It is very simple; it does not have all the references and all the rest of it, but it tells you how many contacts. There are 76 945 contacts made to Child Protection. At the end of that, we have 967 children entering care for the last reporting period, so you can see the funnel down. The other aspect of this is the reasons why they are coming in. Substantiations make up 25 per cent, which is neglect. We talk about abuse as being what is done to children; neglect is about what is not being done. I have made some copies of that.

The CHAIR: We will take that as tabled; we will just need a motion from the committee to assign that status to it. At this stage it is still a private document.

Mr Searle: By way of explanation, you will notice that there is a range. We call this the funnel diagram, for obvious reasons, as you can see. The intent of that is to show what we do with each of those queries, how we process them and then how many flow through to the next level of severity, which ends up with the 967 into care.

[4.30 pm]

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Can I just seek whether you might provide an average cycle time of children. This might be difficult information to capture, but if you could, just to get a sense of how many children cycle in on an intermittent basis who are there for a week or two weeks, just the proportionality of children under care by length of stay, I suppose.

Ms Tang: I do believe we can provide that information. We do not have 15 copies of it today, but if we take it on notice, we can provide it. Again, it does not give you a true picture, because every case is different as to why they do that.

Hon SUE ELLERY: We can take that on notice.

[*Supplementary Information No C15.*]

The CHAIR: The committee has met and has designated this document public.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Going back to attachment A to question 5 prior to the hearings that we were looking at before, the first document, the first briefing note —

Hon SUE ELLERY: Can you go slowly, because it was taken off me, so I no longer have it in front of me. It is okay, I will see what I can do.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The first document attached to attachment A is a briefing note signed by the minister on 12 December 2017. In it at the top of page 2 it says that as at 6 December 2017, the total number of victims is 224; perpetrators charged, 43; and the number of charges, 346. Where would that figure of 224 victims have been obtained from?

Mr Geddes: That would have been the number of contacts the department would have had open in relation to the operation at the time.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The number of contacts at the department meaning —

Mr Geddes: Young people who have been brought to our attention.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The department being the Department of Communities. So, the number of contacts.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Can I just get the language right? Did you say at the outset “notifications of concern”?

Mr Geddes: Notifications of concern, yes.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So, the department would know who the 224 are?

Mr Geddes: At that time. Because it is a live operation, that number will vary. Young people will come on to it, come off it, as those concerns are addressed or alleviated.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Are all 224, therefore, children by virtue of the fact that it is coming to the department?

Mr Geddes: That is correct. I would use the term “alleged victims”, but, yes, 224.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Is the department then in a position to tell us what the current number is?

Mr Geddes: I have not got that figure on me right now.

Hon SUE ELLERY: We could take it on notice.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: To make sure that we are talking about the same dataset, wherever the data came from for the 224—to use the language of the witness—alleged victims. I do not really mind what language is used for it. It is that same dataset that I am asking for as at today, which may be 224; it may be a higher figure; it may be a lower figure; we do not know. But that is what you are taking on notice.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I understand that.

The CHAIR: As at today?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: As at today, please.

Hon SUE ELLERY: We will do it as of today.

[Supplementary Information No C16.]

Hon NICK GOIRAN: In answers prior to hearings question 3(f), it talked about the amount of staff carrying more than 15 cases. Given that 12 out of the 18 districts never once had a period when all staff had under the limit of 15 cases, does the department intend to address this issue of overextended staff?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will ask Ms Tang to make a response.

Ms Tang: We have just made some decisions in relation to new staff, which will start on 1 January. They are not all case-carrying staff, but the majority are. As an example, we have got an additional 13 positions going to Cannington, about 11 going to Peel; there are regional positions as well. That will see a relief in some of the demand that is on staff at the moment.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: These new positions will start on 1 January?

Ms Tang: Yes. They are additional. I am just cautious to be giving you the numbers when I do not have them before me.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: How about we take it on notice?

Hon SUE ELLERY: We will take it on notice. I note it is outside the reporting period. I do not think it is a secret, but I will take it on notice in any event.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Sure. This is the way in which the government is dealing with the problem that has been identified in the reporting period.

[Supplementary Information No C17.]

Hon SUE ELLERY: Let us not —

The CHAIR: It is getting late in the day, can we keep going, please.

Hon SUE ELLERY: You do not want me tired and grumpy.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: During the reporting period, we have got the information there as to how many had more than 15 cases. Are you able to tell us how many had more than 18 cases?

Mr Geddes: We do not have the information.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will take that on notice.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Is it possible to get that information, though?

Hon SUE ELLERY: We think that it is.

[Supplementary Information No C18.]

Hon NICK GOIRAN: That will be for the reporting period.

Hon SUE ELLERY: For the reporting period.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Can we also find out what the number is as at today's date?

Hon SUE ELLERY: You can ask.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Yes, please.

The CHAIR: We will continue that as C18.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Just back to working with children checks, if I can. I refer to page 45 of the annual report that stated that as at 30 June there were 1 030 negative notices. If an applicant has previously received a negative notice, is it possible for them to submit a new application at an Australia Post outlet and receive a receipt to provide their employer to allow them to work until the application is assessed again?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I think I need to ask Mr Jolly that.

Mr Jolly: I am just processing that. The question was —

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The summary is: somebody has already received a negative notice. They know full well they have been—I am going to use the phrase—knocked back. They go in and apply for another one, they get the receipt, they give it to their new employer, who of course would have no idea that the person has been knocked back previously. Is that something that people can do and effectively manipulate the system?

Hon SUE ELLERY: It would be breaking the law. Perhaps you can walk through the penalties and the checks. The new employer would have to satisfy themselves that the person had a working with children check.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Or an application in progress.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Correct. Perhaps you can walk the honourable member through that.

Mr Jolly: I think your point, minister, is actually correct. The legislative framework establishes a number of very serious penalties, and certainly section 22 or 23 of the working with children act imposes a penalty for a person who has a negative notice who then engages in child-related work. So, if that person had already received a negative notice and then under the scenario that you described went to Australia Post, submitted an application and then engaged in child-related work, they would at that point be committing an offence. I guess, without really having thought through the process in great detail, understanding the way the process works, that application would come through once the proof of identity et cetera had been done, and it would be picked up very quickly.

There is a turnaround time on negative notices. The application would come into working with children, it would go straight out for screening, it would receive a hit pretty quickly, I would think. At that point, the flag would go up to say that the person has been issued with a negative notice for engaging in child-related work, which would trigger a compliance action.

[4.40 pm]

Hon NICK GOIRAN: At that point in time, who prosecutes that offence?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Can you walk through the compliance action?

Mr Jolly: Certainly. In those circumstances the working with children screening unit has a compliance framework in place that essentially evaluates the degree of risk and, I guess within that, the level of intent in relation to a particular offence. In the circumstances that you have just outlined, intent would be pretty clear, I would think. In those circumstances the unit would conduct an investigation, establish the relevant facts, establish a proof of evidence, and the director of the unit has the delegation to commence proceedings through the State Administrative Tribunal.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Were any proceedings established in the reporting period?

Mr Jolly: In the reporting period, proceedings were established in relation to two notifications. They both received media, I think, throughout the reporting period in relation to the Cottesloe Surf Life Saving Club.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So there were two prosecutions undertaken by the department in the reporting period?

Mr Jolly: There was in relation to the individual who engaged in child-related work in relation to the employer who employed that person.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: If I can then refer you to questions 1 and 2 prior to the hearing: the minister said during the reporting period there were zero Department of Communities' employees in child-related work who on any given day did not have a valid working with children card or an application in process; yet, in answer to question 3, the minister said one negative notice was issued to an employee in the department. Is that employee still with the department?

Hon SUE ELLERY: We would have to take it on notice.

[Supplementary Information No C19.]

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Yes, you can take it on notice. No-one knows anything about that one negative notice that happened in the department in the reporting period?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I have just answered the question and I said we will take it on notice.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I have got a second question: nobody here today knows anything about the negative notice?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am surprised that I have to do this. I turned to the relevant officer who indicated to me he could not provide an answer today and that is what I have just advised the Chair.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I think, Chair, there is a misunderstanding as to what the question was. The question that has been taken on notice is: is that employee still with the department? The minister understandably checked and that is not known and so it has been taken on notice. My second question, which is unrelated to that employee, is: does anybody here know anything about that one negative notice?

Mr Jolly: I am not familiar with that specific detail. What I can say is if an employee was issued with a negative notice, it would be my very strong belief that that person's employment would have been

terminated because it is an offence to employ a person in those circumstances. I am just not familiar with the specifics of that sitting here today. Subject to the minister's views, we would be happy to provide it—not in relation to the name of the individual, of course.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: In what child-related work was the employee working for the department and for what period of time?

Hon SUE ELLERY: We are not able to answer that question. I will take it on notice.

The CHAIR: We will add all of that into C19.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I would like to go back briefly to the issue of the Kath French centre, if I can, on page 145. Minister, I am aware that during the reporting period there were some issues with the Kath French centre, which is a really important service, being able to access CAMHS or, more accurately, have CAMHS deliver the necessary services directly out to the Kath French centre. I would like to know whether that has subsequently been resolved. I understand that the problem was at the CAMHS end, not at the Kath French centre end, which, as an aside, I am pretty impressed with the approach that is being taken there at the moment.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Thank you for that. I am advised that we will need to take that on notice.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Can I be clear on what the question is. The question is whether the issue of having CAMHS attend the Kath French centre, which was an issue during the reporting period, has subsequently been resolved.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I understand the question.

[Supplementary Information No C20.]

Hon ALISON XAMON: Can I please go to page 54, "Women's interests", and the development of the WA women's strategy. I have a simple question: is it intended that the strategy will include reference to addressing the issue of pay equity?

Ms Nys: The strategy has not yet commenced, so very broadly there is a whole range of issues which we would want to capture in the strategy but we will consult with the community on issues of concern to the community and then, as a result of that, the strategy will be developed. One could hypothesise that that may well be an issue raised by the community —

The CHAIR: Except we do not do hypotheticals in this committee.

Hon ALISON XAMON: If I can ask about process then, through the minister: you have mentioned that there may be an opportunity for community input into suggestions for that strategy. Can I ask what the time frame is and what the process will be for soliciting that community input?

Hon SUE ELLERY: What the annual report included was that in the reporting period, the communities department began developing a strategy. What you are asking now is about the government's timetable for further consultation. I cannot answer that and I am not sure that the minister is ready to make that announcement herself either. I will take it on notice, but I cannot guarantee that the minister will provide you with the information that you need because the timing of the announcement will be up to her.

[Supplementary Information No C21.]

Hon ALISON XAMON: I had a series of questions which have been appropriately answered as a result of the "funnel" paper which has been supplied. I want to thank you for that because you have wiped out a bunch of questions that I needed to ask.

I would like to go to page 74, please, the page dealing with “Outcome—The Early Education and Care sector met required quality standards”. I note that only 68 per cent met standards. What I would like to know is in which areas are they failing to meet those standards?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will ask Mr Jolly to provide you with some information, if he is able to.

Mr Jolly: In terms of the breakdown of each of the seven quality areas, I am not able to provide that detail today. Broadly, under the national quality framework, services are assessed against the national quality standards. Those quality standards comprise seven quality areas and then a number of elements that comprise each one of those areas. But ultimately those assessments result in a rating of either “not meeting the standard”, “working towards the standard”, “meeting the standard”, “exceeding” or “excellent”. This particular indicator is interesting to the extent to which services either met or exceeded. We are either “meeting”, “exceeding” or “excellent”. The reason why there is a variation is largely as a result of the fact that there were a higher number than anticipated new services coming into the market during that period. The system is designed to operate in such a way that it stimulates or prompts, if you like, continuous improvement over time. If a service wanted to go the rating or an assessment of the kind that I have just described, and will have a quality improvement plan, it will then use that quality improvement plan to improve its service provision and so you would expect then the next time it undergoes an assessment, it will receive a higher assessment as a result of that. That assumes that a certain proportion of services will continue to operate under the same management over that course of time.

There was a greater degree of churn, if you like, within the market than was anticipated. You had a large number of new services starting off a lower base and were typically rated as working towards, as opposed to meeting or exceeding. There were very, very few services that were rated as excellent. That is one of the reasons. There has also been some changes more recently to the National Quality Standard itself, which has effectively raised the bar. But I think for the purposes of this reporting period, that would be less of an impact than perhaps the number of new services coming into the market.

[4.50 pm]

Hon ALISON XAMON: In terms of that large discrepancy, you are primarily laying that at the feet of the new providers coming into the market for having skewed the way that that has been assessed?

Mr Jolly: Yes, certainly. The National Quality Standard came into place in Western Australia in I think August 2012, so in the development of these indicators at the time that they were set, it was working off a relatively small sample of services that had been assessed and rated at that point in time. As the education and care regulatory unit was rolling out the new standards, the number of services that were able to undergo assessment and rating in the first year or two of the program was quite small, as the sector and the unit became familiar with the new scheme. At the time that these indicators were being set, there were some assumptions made about a whole range of things, including the number of new services that were likely to enter the market and the extent to which existing services would meet those standards. So, yes, a greater than anticipated number of new services coming into the market, and also really extrapolating the target based on a very small initial sample.

Hon ALISON XAMON: This is just a general reflection on the report. I was surprised. I note that FASD is not mentioned in the annual report at all. I would have thought that it would have been one of those areas that would have been underpinning a huge amount of the work within the department. I was wondering whether there are any training initiatives for staff around FASD. Is any specific research or work being done with the Telethon Kids Institute around FASD? I know it is a very general question, but as I say, I was surprised that it was not mentioned anywhere in the report.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will ask one of the officers to make some comment in a minute, but I just make the point that because it does not appear in the annual report does not mean that it is not something that child protection officers deal with every single day. Because it is not reflected in the annual report does not mean that it is not part of their daily work.

Hon ALISON XAMON: No, but I would have thought it would have been —

Hon SUE ELLERY: If you would let me finish my answer. Indeed, a range of agencies across government are working together on FASD. There is a cabinet subcommittee, which deals with social policy areas, in which Communities is a member as the Minister for Communities, and the Minister for Health, the Minister for Education and Training, the Minister for Corrective Services, the Attorney General, the Minister for Police—there may be one more—for all of whom FASD is a significant issue for large parts of their clientele. I might ask the director general if there is anyone that can make some comments about it.

Mr Searle: I am happy to do this myself, minister. The member is absolutely right: FASD is a significant issue for us. It is a very significant issue in some particular parts of the north west of the state. No, it has not been highlighted as a particular issue in the report because it is just one of a range of challenges that young people face, whether it is autism or FASD or a range of challenges that we have to accommodate. I think the most challenging thing of the whole FASD debate, which became apparent during the Banksia Hill analysis of the kids with neurological problems, is that none of the discussion was about prevention. The reality of FASD is that it is totally preventable. You cannot actually treat it; you cannot fix it. I just think that the public debate and the debate that this agency needs to get more involved in is how you deal with young women and particularly young pregnant women drinking to excess while they are pregnant. It is a linear equation. We probably have not put enough effort to date into the preventive end. We are working with Country Health to look at that. They have had programs over time. Where you focus on this problem needs to be very much at that end of the spectrum and not at the how do you deal with the children, because they will just keep on coming unless we deal with the issue.

Hon ALISON XAMON: In terms of this reporting period, was there any work undertaken around the issue of prevention of FASD by the Department of Communities?

Mr Searle: There were definitely discussions engaged with Country Health, particularly in the north west of the state, around what they were doing and what they were not doing, and how we could help them with that story and particularly how we could work with the local Aboriginal medical services. One of the problems with FASD is that the actual diagnosis is particularly tricky and very expensive. Getting the right practitioners in the right place at the right time to do that is a challenge for all of us. I would be hopeful that we can actually do something in the awareness and prevention end of the spectrum in the foreseeable future.

Mr Geddes: We do staff training through the learning and development centre for staff around FASD and how to identify and work with it. As Grahame said, whilst it is expensive to diagnose, it also does not necessarily open up treatment options as a result of a diagnosis either. There are other ways of actually accessing that treatment without the diagnosis as such.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Just tangentially related, the other thing not mentioned in the reporting period around the machinery-of-government challenges has been in the shift of youth justice into the Department of Communities. Was there activity during the reporting period to try to progress the movement of youth justice as part of the machinery-of-government changes into the Department of Communities?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes, but I am not sure that it is appropriate to this particular annual report. Could you ask the question again?

Hon ALISON XAMON: When the government first announced the machinery-of-government changes, during this reporting period it was also touted that youth justice would be moving into the Department of Communities. I am asking, because it has not happened clearly, whether during this reporting period there was activity undertaken to effect that announcement.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will take that on notice. I think it is up to the minister to make a decision about whether and what she wants to say about that.

Hon ALISON XAMON: During the reporting period.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes.

[Supplementary Information No C22.]

The CHAIR: That concludes the hearings with the Department of Communities. Before I make my closing statement, I just wanted to acknowledge that, for Mr Searle, this may be his last annual report hearing with our committee, and to acknowledge that he has provided over 47 years of public service. On behalf of the committee, I thank him for that and indicate that particularly some members of the committee will miss his contribution to annual reporting and budget estimates. Thank you.

On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. The committee will forward the transcript of evidence, which highlights any questions taken on notice and any additional questions that members may have. This will be forwarded after Monday, 26 November. Responses to these questions will be required within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. If you are unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. If members have any unasked questions, I ask them to submit these by the electronic lodgement system on the POWAnet site by five o'clock, Wednesday, 21 November. Once again, thank you for your attendance.

Hearing concluded at 4.59 pm
