

Chair; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Mia Davies; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Zak Kirkup; Ms Jessica Shaw;
Mrs Robyn Clarke

Division 4: Public Sector Commission, \$25 594 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr M. McGowan, Minister for Public Sector Management.

Ms S. O'Neill, Public Sector Commissioner.

Mr D. Volaric, Executive Director, Integrity and Risk.

Mr S. McLeod, Manager, Corporate Services.

Mr L. Warner, Executive Director, Workforce Policy and Practice.

Ms T. Milici, Acting Executive Director, Workforce Data Analytics.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. The Chair will ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by Friday, 30 October 2020. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

Are there any questions? Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I refer to page 81 of budget paper No 2 under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". The second dot point states —

Information currently collected on the public sector workforce is limited and not timely, making informed decision-making that is data-led difficult.

Can the Premier explain what this significant issue is about with respect to data management on who is employed in the public sector?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will let the Public Sector Commissioner comment.

Ms S. O'Neill: Since becoming the Public Sector Commissioner I have been interested in the kind of workforce data that we collect about the whole sector—what we understand about the sector and its size and composition. Historically, the Public Sector Commission has put in place data collection methodologies. I am seeking to improve those so that we have a better understanding of the composition of the workforce. From time to time, having been a line agency and putting information into those collection systems, the agencies themselves do not get a lot of information back on which they can do their workforce planning. It is fair to say that some of the collections are incomplete and could be better. It is more from an improvement perspective so that we can make better decisions around the kind of development that staff might need across the sector and whether we perhaps seek to do more mobility across the sector. It really comes from a position of wanting to improve our knowledge. All agencies hold their individual data analysis, but as we have historically gathered information, doing that in a way that is more robust, we seek to have better reliability and validity with some of the data. We are reviewing all of those data collections to see where some improvements can be made.

One of the areas we are considering is developing a census approach by which we can ask on a voluntary basis from staff across the sector more information to understand better the diversity and then we can put better supports in place. As I said, it comes from an improvement perspective.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I am curious to know how workforce planning has occurred in the past in the absence of that data.

Ms S. O'Neill: I did not say that it has not occurred. All agencies undertake workforce planning and, as I said, this is a means to improve that information. Different agencies ask different questions. I suppose I am looking for some greater consistency so that we can look at trends and provide additional support and policy assistance to agencies. It is more to improve what we have. Other jurisdictions have collection methodologies in place that are more robust.

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Every agency has workforce planning. That is why we are in a reasonable position around workforce planning, but more can be done to make that more robust.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I refer to the third dot point on page 81. I am pleased to see that an integrity strategy is being put in place. With respect to misconduct and corruption, how many public servants have been the subject of criminal and integrity investigations over the past two years?

Mr M. McGOWAN: We have often been through this here. There is a division between what the PSC deals with and what the Corruption and Crime Commission deals with. Corruption is something that the CCC investigates. Minor misconduct is something that comes to the Public Sector Commission to deal with, but obviously the Public Sector Commission wants to encourage an environment and educate people to avoid misconduct and corruption. I ask the Public Sector Commissioner to comment further.

Ms S. O'Neill: From a minor misconduct perspective, which, as the Premier says, is the part of the CCC act that we administer, I think the question was how many matters had been received. In the financial year 2019–20, 473 matters were received by the commission. As the Premier said, the separation is between what the CCC will receive and what the PSC will receive. We work closely together because under the notification guidelines, individuals might send a notification or a report to the CCC. If it is the threshold for minor misconduct, the CCC would refer that back to us. Similarly, if we received a report that was more appropriately of a criminal corruption nature, we would pass that through to the CCC.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I refer to page 84 and the table at the bottom of the page under “Oversight and Reporting”. Significant increases have occurred in the cost of delivering that service, but there has also been a significant increase in the income that was expected in the budget. Income of \$13 000 was expected and \$249 000 was received. What is the breakdown of that income? Why has there been such a significant increase in what was budgeted in the total cost of service?

[3.40 pm]

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will let the director general comment.

Ms S. O'Neill: Are you looking at the “Total Cost of Service” and the difference between the 2019–20 budget and 2019–20 actual?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Yes, that is right. The budgeted amount was \$7.536 million and the actual was \$7.901 million, with a perceived glide path to go to \$8.6 million next year.

Ms S. O'Neill: If I can continue on, Premier. The differential there, as I understand it, is the cost of the review that was undertaken into the Housing Authority, under the Department of Communities, arising from the Paul Whyte matter.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Is it possible to get the cost of that inquiry, please?

Mr M. McGOWAN: The review of the Housing Authority was tabled in Parliament on 11 August this year. Obviously, there were some deficiencies that allowed Mr Whyte to get away with what he had gotten away with for many years. The commission is monitoring the implementation by the Department of Communities of the 56 recommendations. EY was engaged on 3 December 2019 and provided its report on 17 June 2020 at a total cost of \$220 400.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: That was Ernst and Young?

Mr M. McGOWAN: EY, yes.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Directly under “Total Cost of Service” is the line item “Less Income”. Is the income jump from lodgement fees for FOI applications or something of that nature? The income budgeted was \$13 000 but \$249 000 has come in. I am interested to know whether that relates to some sort of fee for service.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The Public Sector Commission paid for the review. The income is the recoupment of that cost from the Department of Communities. Obviously, that was a very distressing affair. Getting to the bottom of it and doing our best to prevent those sorts of things from occurring in the future is very, very important.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I have one more question before we move on. I refer to the impact of COVID-19 on the public service. Obviously, it has been a fairly stressful time, with many public servants being required to work from home, which adds strain. Has there been any increase in sick leave over the past six months as a result of the extra demands that have been put on our public servants?

The CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, do you have a particular line item for that question?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: It would come under the delivery of services at the top of page 80. Within that breakdown, I would expect there would be an allocation for sick leave, compassionate leave or other forms of leave. I want to get

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a breakdown to see whether there has been an increase in sick leave taken as a result of the impact of the pressures placed on our public servants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr M. McGOWAN: On 23 March this year, the government introduced up to 20 days paid leave for staff who contract COVID-19 or who are required to self-isolate or care for someone else. At least 326 413 hours of COVID-19 leave was taken between 2 March and 28 June 2020. Additionally, at least 104 000 hours of COVID-19-related personal leave was taken over the same period. This was reported across the public sector to the Public Sector Commission. The number of people reported to have taken COVID-19 leave varied each week throughout the period. The leave peaked during the week of 30 March 2020, a fortnight after WA declared a state of emergency—the member might recall that was a very heightened period—both in the number of people and hours. During that week, 1 895 employees accessed 40 794 hours of COVID-19 leave.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Sorry, Premier, how many hours?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Over that fortnight, 1 895 employees accessed 40 794 hours of COVID-19 leave. It was a very, very difficult period across the entire public sector—across the entire workforce. There are some private sector offices that do not have staff back now. One of the things we are grappling with is trying to get these offices restaffed, particularly in the city. Since then, there obviously has been a significant drop-off in the number of people taking these forms of leave, but this leave was largely taken at the height of this period, in March, April and May this year.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: On page 80, under the “Spending Changes” table, is a line item called “Royalties for Regions—District Allowance”. Can the Premier explain what is happening across the forward estimates, and why?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will let the director general comment.

Ms S. O’Neill: This allowance is provided for the Aboriginal traineeships that we have in the Public Sector Commission, and a number of those traineeships are in the regions. It covers the costs for them, including their cost of living, so that they can access the program. In the last financial year, during the COVID-19 period et cetera, the starting group was a bit smaller than normal, so an adjustment has been made to the allowance.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I refer to page 81 and the significant issues impacting the agency. The fourth paragraph refers to the diversity of the workforce. I note that the government has set a public sector target of 50 per cent for women in the senior executive service. Can the Premier advise the current rate of women employed in the senior executive service and when we might reach gender parity within the SES?

Mr M. McGOWAN: On 4 March, the government announced a public sector employment target of 50 per cent for women in the senior executive service. This builds on our commitment to 50 per cent women on government boards and committees, which was announced on 14 February 2018. I think we have surpassed that now. In March 2020, the representation of women in the SES reached 42.5 per cent. This is the first time it has ever been that high. This is a significant increase from 2017, when representation in the SES sat at 34.2 per cent—a major climb of more than eight per cent. At the current rate of growth, gender parity in the SES will be achieved by 2022. Back in 2018, parity was not anticipated until 2035, so this is a significant improvement. The pay gap continues to trend downwards, which is good news. Gender parity has been reached for the first time in tier 3 leadership roles, which is executive director level, and was at 51.3 per cent in March 2020. This is a significant improvement, as is visually observable in the number of women in senior positions in the public sector.

[3.50 pm]

The CHAIR: Member for Dawesville.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Thank you. Are you sure you do not want to jump in on that one again, member for Armadale?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not mind. Would the member like the afternoon session?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I look forward to the number of dorothy dixers the member will wheel out today!

The CHAIR: Members! Member for Dawesville!

Ms J.J. SHAW: I would love to hear more from the member for Armadale.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I am sure all of us would, member for Swan Hills.

I refer to page 87. My question is on expenditure for salaries and employee benefits under the heading “Expenses”. During the previous hearing with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Premier noted that Director General Foster moved to the Public Sector Commission and then transferred to Treasury. I am keen to understand whether Mr Foster was redeployed from PSC or is still attached to PSC, and any on-costs associated with that.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr Foster is attached to Treasury. It is not unusual for people to move between agencies. His salary is met by Treasury.

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Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: At any point did the Public Sector Commission bear Mr Foster's salary and associated entitlements?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I am sorry; I could not understand the member's question.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Did the Public Sector Commission at any point pay for Mr Foster and his associated entitlements; and, if so, what was that total package?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Again, I could not understand the member's words.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Mr Foster was transferred to the Public Sector Commission and then transferred to the Department of Treasury.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I am advised the employing authority is the Public Sector Commission. He was put on to other functions and transferred to Treasury.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Thank you. I might not understand the Premier's words, but was he put on to other functions for a period of time within PSC and then subsequently transferred to Treasury?

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is a standard mechanism that is used when people move around agencies in the public sector. The "other functions" role is contained within the Public Sector Management Act.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: What was Mr Foster's role during the time he was performing other functions within the commission?

Mr M. McGOWAN: He did not undertake a role at the Public Sector Commission. The other functions role is a mechanism by which someone moves from one agency to another under the Public Sector Management Act.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: For how long was Mr Foster with PSC?

Mr M. McGOWAN: He was never with the Public Sector Commission.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Effectively, he was held by PSC for a moment before he was transferred. It was a transfer process that PSC facilitated.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It was a transfer from one agency to another, because the Public Sector Commission is the employing authority for all directors general.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: There seems to be an inconsistency, because of course the director general of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet suggested that Mr Foster moved to PSC, and PSC is saying that is not the case; he went straight to Treasury.

Mr M. McGOWAN: As I outlined at the time, I recall he had some sick leave, and then he went to Treasury.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: In that case, the statement made in the hearing with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet that Mr Foster was transferred to PSC is not correct.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I think the DPC DG was implying that the Public Sector Commissioner, as is standard, takes responsibility for DGs and allocated Mr Foster to other functions within Treasury.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Was Mr Foster transferred on the same entitlements that he had with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Yes.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Did all the entitlements that Mr Foster had accrued during his time in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet—leave and the like—move across entirely as well?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Yes. That is standard practice.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Does the Premier have a figure for the value of that entire package to Mr Foster for now and his time serving in Treasury?

Mr M. McGOWAN: People in the public sector, like opposition spokespeople, people in the private sector and all employed people, are entitled to their entitlements. That is standard practice.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: It is unusual, of course, Premier, for a former director general to move to Treasury.

The CHAIR: Member, let the Premier answer.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Is the member suggesting a different arrangement? People's entitlements are guaranteed by law.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: So there is no value, Premier?

Mr M. McGOWAN: If the member wants to change the law, he should suggest that.

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Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Sorry?

Mr M. McGOWAN: That is the law. People receive their entitlements.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I refer to the income statement on page 87, and in particular the heading “Cost of Services”. Under “Expenses”, there is a line item “Employee benefits”. There is a discrepancy between these statements and last year’s budget paper that bears some explaining. It states that the actual value for employee benefits for 2018–19 was \$14 348 000; whereas in last year’s budget the estimated actual for 2018–19 was \$18 544 000. There is a \$4.2 million discrepancy between what was reported in last year’s budget versus what is in this year’s budget papers. I hope the Premier can explain what that \$4 million variation is about.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will do my best. The \$3 741 000 variance from the 2018–19 actual to the 2019–20 budget is due mainly to a carryover of employee benefits expenditure of \$913 000 from 2018–19 to 2019–20 for the commission’s implementation of high-priority public sector reform initiatives, including agency capability, leadership and talent; high performing CEOs; and investigating options for a sector-wide curriculum. A 2018–19 budget underspend of \$2.864 million primarily resulted from a number of vacant positions in the Aboriginal traineeship program of \$2.2 million, and in the strategic leadership and talent division of \$324 000.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Can the Premier explain why at the time of last year’s budget that discrepancy was not anticipated, given that last year’s estimated actual was \$18.544 million for that allocation? Why it has taken 18 months or so to correct these figures for those changes bears some explanation.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will let the director general comment.

Ms S. O’Neill: I am advised it is the difference in timing between when the estimated actuals are put in and then the final information.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Could the Premier advise when the estimated actuals are actually submitted with the finals being arrived at, please?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will ask the director general to outsource the answering of that question.

Ms S. O’Neill: I will ask Mr McLeod if he can give us the time differences.

Mr S. McLeod: Yes, the 2019–20 budget cut-off date was one month before the budget was tabled, so it was approximately 9 April 2019.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: In the explanatory notes on page 86, it says that the variance between the employee benefits reflects a significant number of vacant positions during 2018–19. Could the Premier please update us with respect to how many positions were vacant and what those positions were?

[4.00 pm]

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will let the director general explain.

Ms S. O’Neill: With the vacancies, a couple of things were in play at that time. When I arrived at the commission, there was a historical decision to keep understaffed, so it was never staffed to its full FTE and salary expense level. The McGregor review brought attention to that, because of the services that were perhaps not being provided on to the sector, so there is a lag here. We have that vacancy, so some understaffing; then we had the McGregor review, and, during that time, we structured in response to the McGregor review. There was a period of initial vacancy while we were restructuring and while we were filling, and my understanding is that it was around 20 FTE, and they were spread across all service areas. There was not a particular grouping of that number.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Just to confirm, have those 20 identified unfilled FTE positions now all been filled?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will ask the director general to comment.

Ms S. O’Neill: For this year, we anticipate to have pretty much a full staffing complement. Our actual at the end of last year was around 127, and we will have 129. Obviously, there are ups and downs, as people come in or people might leave, but we anticipate to have around 129, which is pretty consistent with what we had last year.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Thank you.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I take the Premier to page 84, under the heading “Oversight and Reporting”. This relates to the Public Sector Commission’s role in breach of public sector standards and its oversight role in minor misconduct and the like. In the year 2019–20, I understand that there were 473 minor misconduct matters that were assessed and actioned by the PSC. Does the Premier have a breakdown of those matters by agency?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I think the member referred to 474 matters.

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Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: It was 473 matters, yes.

Mr M. McGOWAN: These are allegations rather than proven cases. Often, it is personal disputes, or it might be that someone accuses someone of taking some Post-it Notes or paper clips or whatever it might be, and at least a third of cases do not even meet the threshold for minor misconduct. In other cases, there might be some action taken in accordance with the relevant procedures and legislation. As to the actual agencies, I can give the member a breakdown of the numbers in agencies by way of supplementary information, except where there is one case in one agency that might then reveal the identity of someone. We will certainly not provide any details or identity information, but I can provide the member with some further information now. In 2019–20, in the Western Australian public sector, there were 315 matters; local government, 94 matters; government trading enterprises, 40 matters; public universities, 13 matters; and out of jurisdiction, 11 matters, totalling 473. That is roughly consistent with past years. If the member wants to know which agencies these complaints relate to, I suspect the big agencies such as health and education would be the major ones, but we can provide a breakdown by way of supplementary information of the numbers of matters within individual agencies, except, as I say, when it might identify an individual.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I note that supplementary information.

The CHAIR: Premier, are you happy to provide that as supplementary information?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Yes.

The CHAIR: Can you clarify exactly what you are allocating as supplementary information?

Mr M. McGOWAN: That is providing by way of information a breakdown of the agencies where there were matters of minor misconduct complaint made to the Public Sector Commission and the numbers within individual agencies, but not revealing any identities and not revealing agencies whereby there was one complaint that might identify the individual in question.

[Supplementary Information No A4.]

The CHAIR: That is ticket A4, for those playing at home.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I refer to public interest disclosure as well.

The CHAIR: Which page?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: It is the same page, page 84, still under the heading “Oversight and Reporting”. In relation to the same thing, obviously, the Public Sector Commission has an oversight role in how it handles public interest disclosure. I understand through the annual report that the commission received one public interest disclosure, and three in relation to other agencies. I wonder if we might be provided the same breakdown of just the agencies, no further detail.

Mr M. McGOWAN: There has been one public interest disclosure finalised in the last financial year, if that is what the member is asking me. Maybe the director general can comment more broadly on what a public interest disclosure is.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: It is a defined term under the act.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will just correct that: there were three in the last financial year and one between April and June of last year, which is included in the three. That is for the year 2019–20. This is relating to whistleblowers. I am not sure we should reveal the agencies because that might reveal identities. I will let the director general comment.

[4.10 pm]

Ms S. O'Neill: Ordinarily, we would not disclose the agencies because, as whistleblowing legislation, that could lead to the identification of people, so we would not want to reveal a public interest disclosure.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Again, I will clarify the page number for the Premier because, undoubtedly, he will ask what page we are on. We are on the same page: page 84, oversight and reporting. As part of that, in pursuing public interest disclosures and these minor misconduct claims and the like, I assume that the process that the Public Sector Commission undertakes is to investigate those matters. It has a team of investigators to undertake and make further inquiry into those allegations. Is that a correct assertion?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will ask the Public Sector Commissioner to comment.

Ms S. O'Neill: When we receive a public interest disclosure, there is a process that we go through. We were talking before about minor misconduct and public interest disclosures. We have a team of people, but PSC is largely an oversight and education body. We have a small handful of investigators, but under the powers that we have we can engage other people to be involved in the investigation. Previously, with the Paul Whyte matter, we used EY.

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Therefore, it is not necessarily the case that we would undertake the investigative work ourselves. We may do that. We may do part of it. We may outsource part of it.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Commissioner, is that the reason that we have seen a discontinuation of the details of controlled grants and subsidies for certificates in government investigations—that is, that there is no more money in the forward estimates for that? Is that because the commission is now moving it to third parties to conduct those investigations?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will let the director general answer.

Ms S. O'Neill: The director general of every agency is the accountable authority for the investigating matters that come to them. There was a program, I guess by way of uplift, of trying to get more investigative capacity across the sector, and so there was an injection at a particular point in time. Since then, we have developed the first integrity strategy across all public sector agencies, and a fair amount of the work there will be to develop capacity as well. Therefore, it was never envisaged having certificates in government investigations as an ongoing investment, but that does not mean to say that agencies would not be doing it themselves; there was just some added benefit at the time to lead some of that work in that way.

Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE: I refer to budget paper No 2, page 84, service 2, “Assistance and Support”. It states —

This service provides advice, assistance and support to public sector bodies and employees ...

At the election, the government committed to cut the number of senior executive service positions by 20 per cent. How is the government tracking on that? Also, I understand the Public Sector Commission has been assisting the machinery-of-government changes. Can the Premier outline what benefits this has delivered?

Mr M. McGOWAN: We have delivered on our commitment in March 2018. We have reduced the SES to 413. We delivered the four-year pay freeze. It was not the most pleasant of things for people, but, under the circumstances, it was very fortunate that we did that. Members might recall that a lot of people voted against the pay freeze, because we had to legislate it to ensure that it was put in place, but I am pleased to say that no members of the government voted against it. The machinery-of-government changes have certainly helped us to return to surplus, and have also managed the COVID situation by having a more cohesive and coordinated public sector.

The public sector leadership council, which meets regularly, has become much more agile and collaborative. It would have been over 40 people under the former arrangements; it now has 20-odd people. That is an achievement that allows for more coordination in the public sector. The machinery-of-government changes made it easier to mobilise public sector staff across the pandemic, and, as I outlined before, a great many people came together in Dumas House. A whole range of emergency management groups came together, not only the one that I was referring to before in communications, but also the quite famous State Health Incident Control Centre, the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre and the State Emergency Coordination Group. A whole range of them came together to deal with COVID.

The coordination across government has allowed for easier approvals for applicants, whether it is for water licences, environmental approvals or whatever it might be. Amalgamation of land use, management and planning functions across government have been terrific, in addition to our planning reforms, which I am sure will be appreciated by people who want to get out there and build things. We have amalgamated regional development, fisheries, agriculture and food, creating the most significant regional footprint of any state economic agency. We have 600 regional staff and nine regional development commissions are part of that.

We have enhanced services in aquaculture, digital connectivity, regulatory compliance and risk-based approaches for natural resource management. We have reduced red tape because we brought the mines industry, regulation and safety together and have successfully implemented streamlined mining and environmental approvals processes. Mineral tenement applications are now processed ahead of targeted time frames, and we have a significant improvement in licences and all those sorts of things as a result of the reforms that we have put in place. Although it has been three and a half years of hard work, it has borne fruit.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: My question moves on from the excellent question asked by the member for Murray–Wellington on the assistance and support of the reform program that the government has undertaken. Premier, as part of the reform agenda that the government took as part of the public sector reform, a whole bunch of key performance indicators had to be established for directors general. Is that still a requirement; and, if so, does he regularly get reports on those KPIs?

Mr M. McGOWAN: We have in place individual performance agreements for directors general, which are regularly signed off by ministers.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Premier, as part of the public sector reform, a number of key recommendations had whole-of-government targets to focus on. They included KPIs for CEOs; changes to procurement practices; umbrella legislation that had to be brought before the house; data-sharing requirements between agencies; a digital

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transformation element that had to be undertaken; and, generally speaking, a strengthening of the budget process as well, to make sure there was a more collaborative approach between agencies. I assume that, as part of the Public Sector Commission, the Premier gets regular reports on where agencies are at with regard to the public sector reform agenda that he announced in 2017–18. Where are the agencies at now with meeting those goals and key recommendations from the review?

Mr M. McGOWAN: As the member knows, earlier this year, in light of the potential world economic meltdown and health crisis that we confronted, we suspended the Our Priorities program that we had brought in in 2018–19. We announced that publicly. I will let the director general comment on the other parts of the member's question.

Ms S. O'Neill: Following that decision, part of the government's policy, which was certainly put to me as a new commissioner, was to strengthen the CEO performance agreements and the way they were enacted. Therefore, right now, we are undertaking a trial with all the directors general of a new strength and performance approach. It is a two-year trial so that we can evaluate the whole cycle. It is more contemporary, and, in my view, having been a director general for 12 years, it certainly strengthens the approach. It introduces a contemporary practice in performance assessment, first of all, by self-assessment, and then by gaining insights into a director general's performance in two ways. The first year gains insights internally, and so for the first time we asked for a de-identified survey of performance from inside the agency. In the second year, we will ask for external validation from stakeholders. We have divided the performance agreement into two parts: the delivery, and the member would typically see in a director general's performance agreement the kinds of commitments that need to be delivered, including the initiatives and whether they are on time, on budget and effective; and the leadership characteristics. It is a strengthened agreement.

[4.20 pm]

Unlike before, as commissioner, I now meet with every director general. I have done that this year. I am part of the assessment process. Even though I have had the power to do it, it has not been a feature of the previous performance processes. Overall, it is a strengthened arrangement with DGs now getting direct feedback. They also get it obviously from their ministers. At the start of the process, we introduced a letter of expectation from their ministers outlining the expectation, which we have not had before. Overall, it is strengthened. It brings into play government priorities, so even though, as the Premier indicated, Our Priorities was paused during this COVID period, we have made sure that all the important aspects of the director generals' performances and their delivery are built into their agreements, whereas in the past it has been quite linear and not particularly focused on either the delivery or the performance aspect.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: This is my final question on the service priority review. There were 17 recommendations and, I think, 37 actions that had to be undertaken as part of that review. I imagine that the commissioner would track the implementation of those recommendations and actions. Can the Premier provide by way of supplementary information an update on where the government is at with the implementation of those recommendations and actions?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Where all those particular reform initiatives are at is more a question for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. We put a range of them on hold at the beginning of the COVID pandemic so that the public sector focused on what was more important. Our Priorities was obviously suspended. A lot of the service priority review and its implementation and the ongoing implementation of the Langoulant recommendations has been done, but it would have been better had the member asked about where exactly they are at during the DPC division, because that is the agency that has responsibility for the implementation.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I appreciate that, Premier. The commissioner has called in agency CEOs as part of the new agreements that have been put in place. Can we get an understanding of how many agency heads the commissioner is yet to meet with as part of that process?

Mr M. McGOWAN: The commissioner advises me that she has met with them all.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Paragraph 5 on page 81 of the budget papers refers to strong leadership and capability being ensured by the Public Sector Commission to try to improve executive performance and development. Can the Premier elaborate on how that work by the PSC is going in trying to improve executive performance and development?

Mr M. McGOWAN: As we just referred to, we undertook the service priority review in 2017. Executive performance was amended to clarify the expectation of those in leadership positions. As a result, the Public Sector Commission has commenced trialling a new delivery and performance approach. Seventeen DGs are participating in the trial. It includes a performance and delivery agreement that runs over two years. The agreement was set in October 2019, the midyear review is in October this year and the assessment will be between June and October 2021. I am advised that feedback has been positive from directors general, in particular those relating to the support and feedback measures built into the approach. The approach is flexible. It has meant that new deliverables and priorities relating to the COVID-19 pandemic have been able to be incorporated. That also includes the implementation of the initiatives in the "WA Recovery Plan". We anticipate that the approach will be applied to all CEOs from 2021–22. The Public Sector Commissioner might want to provide any further information, or she has already. She already has.

Chair; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Mia Davies; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Zak Kirkup; Ms Jessica Shaw;
Mrs Robyn Clarke

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I have a new question, but I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition has more questions on this matter. I refer to page 84 of the budget papers and the oversight and reporting service. As part of the oversight functions, the Public Sector Commission provides support to the ministers on their compliance with the Public Sector Management Act. I understand that the PSC might have a role to play in helping to support ministers and their offices with managing issues within their offices and their agencies more generally. I wonder whether the commissioner could speak to whether there has been much involvement in supporting ministers with their functions prescribed under the act on issues relating to their ministerial offices?

Mr M. McGOWAN: There has not been a great deal of call on the Public Sector Commissioner over the last financial year in respect of the matters the member is raising.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Does the Public Sector Commission provide support for ongoing investigations that might be undertaken? Obviously, in recent history, a matter from a minister's office ended up in the courts. Did the Public Sector Commission provide support as part of that investigation?

Mr M. McGOWAN: It was reported to the Public Sector Commission in accordance with normal practices, but as the member will recall, the matter was referred to the police and it has now been through the courts.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: How many matters relating to ministerial offices have been referred to the Public Sector Commission in the last financial year?

Mr M. McGOWAN: There were two. The member is aware of one. There was another matter.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Has that matter now been resolved?

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is a matter that we cannot discuss. It is currently under active consideration by other authorities.

The appropriation was recommended.

[4.30 pm]