

Chairman; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Bill Johnston; Dr Mike Nahan; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Mr Ian Blayney; Mrs Liza Harvey

Division 3: Premier and Cabinet (except Office of Native Title), \$164 301 000 —

Mr M.W. Sutherland, Chairman.

Mr C.J. Barnett, Premier.

Mr P.F. Conran, Director General.

Mr D.R.M. Smith, Deputy Director General, Coordination.

Mr G.J. Moore, Assistant Director General, State Administration and Corporate Support.

Mr S. Home, Acting Deputy Director General, Strategic Issues.

Mr R. Kennedy, Director, State Administration.

Mrs R.A. Brown, Executive Director, Strategic Projects.

Mr R. Muirhead, State Director, Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup, Adviser, Office of the Premier.

The CHAIRMAN: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard staff. The daily proof *Hansard* will be published at 9.00 am tomorrow.

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. This is the prime focus of the committee. Although there is scope for members to examine many matters, questions need to be clearly related to a page number, item, program, or amount within the volumes. For example, members are free to pursue performance indicators that are included in the *Budget Statements* while there remains a clear link between the questions and the estimates.

It is the intention of the Chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point.

The Premier 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 Premier 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 Premier's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the committee clerk by Friday, 10 June 2011 so that members may read it before the report and third reading stages. If the supplementary information cannot be provided within that time, written advice is required of the day by which the information will be made available. Details in relation to supplementary information have been provided to both members and advisers, and, accordingly, I ask the Premier to cooperate with those requirements. I caution members that if the Premier asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice with the Clerk's office. Only supplementary information that the Premier agrees to provide will be sought by Friday, 10 June 2011.

It will greatly assist Hansard if, when referring to the program statements volumes or the consolidated account estimates, members give the page number, items, program and amount in preface to their question.

I now ask the Premier to introduce his advisers to the committee.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I refer to page 80 of the *Budget Statements*, under "Services and Key Efficiency Indicators", and the average cost of a ministerial office. What position will Dixie Marshall be taking up for the government, what roles will she undertake, what salary package will she be engaged on, and what are the elements of that salary package?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Dixie Marshall's correct title will be principal media adviser. Her role and responsibility will be coordinating not only media issues from my office, but also across government in terms of ministerial offices. As to her salary and conditions of employment, that is not something I am directly involved in. That is a matter that is negotiated through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: On that same matter, although the Premier might not be directly personally engaged, he has his department officials here and I am sure he can provide the committee with an indication of the salary package or other details.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am not prepared to do that; however —

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Mr E.S. RIPPER: That is outrageous! This is taxpayers' money; it is not the Premier's money. This is taxpayers' money, and the Premier should be accountable and tell the public how much she is being paid.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Leader of the Opposition did not even have the courtesy of letting me finish the sentence. I will not do that until Dixie Marshall is employed and all contracts are concluded and signed. If the Leader of the Opposition then wishes to ask me a question either in Parliament or on notice, I will provide the details, but not until Ms Marshall is actually employed within the government sector. She is not at this stage, and I think that is an invasion of her privacy. Once she is employed, if the Leader of the Opposition wishes to ask that question, I will answer it in full.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Does the Premier really expect us to believe that a public announcement has been made and that she has left her current employment without there being any indication of the salary package or the level at which she is going to be employed? I ask, for example, if she is going to be called "principal media adviser", is she replacing the position that Cath Hart occupies, which is paid at level 9? Is she going to receive level 9 remuneration? We know Cath Hart's level, but is the Premier not prepared to tell us Dixie Marshall's level?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am very prepared to answer that question when Dixie Marshall is no longer a private individual. When she goes into the employment of government, I will answer that question.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Could the Premier perhaps provide us with information about the salary package of Dixie Marshall's predecessor? Dixie Marshall is replacing someone else; what salary package was that person on?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Well, the Leader of the Opposition has just referred to Cath Hart, who is about to have a child and is going on maternity leave. The Leader of the Opposition has said that he knows her level.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Premier has provided that information to the house.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: She is a government employee; Dixie Marshall is not yet a government employee. I will not infringe on people's private information until they are public employees. Sorry; Dixie Marshall's correct working title will be director of government media, so she will work across media across government offices—by that, I mean ministerial offices. It is a slightly different role.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Is she replacing the Premier's senior media adviser or strategic communications adviser, Mr Hallett or Mr Wright?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Is it a new position on top of those positions?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It is a merging of some roles. Bear in mind that this government stopped, or removed, the Government Media Office that existed under previous governments, and we distributed its staff to ministerial offices—some to my office and some who are involved in media monitoring and a few other duties are within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Therefore, it is an entirely different structure of media services.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I just have a couple of follow-up questions.

The CHAIRMAN: I will give the call to the member for Balcatta.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I am happy to defer to the Leader of the Opposition so that we can continue on the same topic.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Will Ms Marshall be employed on a term-of-government contract; and what selection process was used to determine her appointment?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: She will be on a contract; she will not be a permanent public servant. I do not know the details of that contract; that is a negotiating point between her and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. When all those conclusions are finalised and she begins work, I will happily divulge all those details. There is no secrecy about it; I just have a matter of principle that I will not discuss the employment conditions of someone who is yet to begin their employment.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Would the Premier say that a \$300 000 package would be out of the question?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I think that would be out of the question.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The Premier referred to having abolished the GMO, and my questions are: what is the total cost of media services provided across ministerial offices; and, what are the total number of media staff engaged across ministerial offices, including media processing staff and media monitoring staff, now that the Premier has made these cuts?

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Mr C.J. BARNETT: If the member wants a full listing of the number of positions and levels and whether they have use of a car or not, which I assume is what the member is asking for, then that is quite a detailed question.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Will the Premier undertake to provide the answer?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am just trying to see what information the member wants. It is comparable to the previous government. Could the member tell me exactly what he wants to know? There is no great secrecy about this; these people are all employed.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I think the specific question —

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Who is asking the question? Which one is asking it?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I was able to comprehend the question.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I do not think the member has the call.

The CHAIRMAN: Can the member for Warnbro just repeat what he was asking about, in case there is any confusion.

Mr P. PAPALIA: What is the total number of media staff engaged across ministerial offices, including media processing staff and media monitoring staff, and at what levels? Therefore, what amount of money is being sucked up by that organisation?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am happy to provide that. Basically, every minister has a media officer; I have two, and a couple of people work there. I will provide the exact number to the member if he wishes.

[Supplementary Information No A8.]

The CHAIRMAN: Has the Premier got the full detail of what is to be provided?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Yes.

[2.10 pm]

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I refer to the average cost per ministerial office outlined on page 80. Have Messrs Pontifex and Wedgwood divested themselves of their Woodside shares, what are the current details about total packages for the senior executives in the Premier's office, and how many people in his ministerial office have declared conflicts of interest?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: To my understanding, Mr Pontifex no longer has any Woodside shares. I think Mr Wedgwood may have some, but it is not a particularly significant number. What were the other questions?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I would like details of the senior executive salary packages in the Premier's office.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Whom is the member talking about? There are about 20 people in my office.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The people who are classified as senior executives. Can the Premier indicate the total salary packages for those people who are working as senior executives in his office?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: All of that information has been provided to Parliament in the ministerial resource report that the government tables every six months. This is the first government ever to do that, and we do it every six months.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The last question was: have any of the people in the Premier's ministerial office declared conflicts of interest?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: In recent times, formally, no, I am not aware of any. Nothing comes to mind. The director general has just reminded me that if they believe that there is a conflict of interest, they are required to inform the Director General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. I am not aware of any conflicts of interest being declared in recent times.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: I refer to the major spending changes on page 75. There is a line item with \$10 million for the community development investment fund in 2011–12. Can the Premier give us some description of that program?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: That fund relates to loan arrangements that are sometimes converted into grants. On occasions, the government might give a community group a loan, and, if it satisfies certain conditions, that may ultimately convert into a grant after a certain period. I will try to find an example. The community development investment fund was part of the recommendations of the Economic Audit Committee. It was announced in the 2010–11 budget as a low-interest loan scheme for community sector organisations. It was to assist those organisations in particular that are unable to borrow funds. The loans are designed to provide capital investment

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to build financial self-support. It might be for fit-outs of buildings, computer equipment, photocopiers and whatever else. Those loans are made on very favourable conditions and often are converted into grants.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The average cost of support provided per ministerial office is outlined on page 80. I refer to media reports that Mr Conran has made a decision to decline payment of the incredible 13 per cent increase in one year to senior public servants. I wonder whether, as reported, Mr Conran made that decision after being approached by the journalist or whether he made the decision prior to that time. In refusing this particular pay increase, will Mr Conran subsequently receive a full and additional pay increase next financial year? Does it mean that he will go up to only this level of pay next year, or will he subsequently jump two pay levels? What is the mechanism by which Mr Conran has refused the pay increase? Are other senior public servants also refusing the pay increase that was reported in this story?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The first point I make is that the employment contracts for senior public servants are set by the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal quite independently of government. As part of its determinations, it has built in a pay increment after a period of service under that contract. Mr Conran advised me that he had not reached that length of service and therefore he declined the increase as it was not yet due.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Are they the only grounds upon which Mr Conran refused the 13 per cent pay increase this year?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: They are the grounds he gave me. At that time, he had not served the time as laid down and therefore he did not believe it was due to him at that stage.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Are any of the other senior public servants referred to in the story refusing the pay increase?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Not to my knowledge, no.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Are they eligible because they have done their time and therefore they are going to accept it?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: There is no reason they should not. This was determined by the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal as part of their employment contract. To my knowledge, no other public servant who has qualified for that increment has declined it, and I would not expect them to.

Mr P. PAPALIA: So the Premier would not expect them to do that.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No.

Mr P. PAPALIA: But what does the Premier say to the firefighters on the front steps of Parliament today who are wondering what will happen to their pay case?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: This is not subject to the estimates committee, but, for the member's information, I listened to the firefighters. They asked me to address them. I had not come prepared or been briefed, but I simply said that I hoped we would reach a fair arrangement on their pay and, as they interjected, also on their conditions. This government has a good record of negotiating fair outcomes with government employees.

Mr P. PAPALIA: What about the police? Are they allowed 13 per cent a year?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: If the member wants to get on a soapbox, he should pop out there himself.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I refer to the employee benefits expenses on page 84. They go from \$69.5 million to \$77 million between the 2010–11 budget and the 2011–12 budget. That is an increase of over 11 per cent in employee benefits, yet the full-time equivalents go up by only one and a bit per cent. I would like some explanation of why there is such extra expenditure on employee benefits within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I will ask the director general to comment on that detail. However, I make the initial observation that the member will recall that this government separated the Public Sector Commission from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. This government is quite consciously upgrading and enhancing the capabilities of the central agencies of government—the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Public Sector Commission and Treasury. That involves recruiting into government some people with the appropriate skills and also searching agencies for people who are seen as future leaders of government departments and who have some experience within the central agencies and have been developed as professionals within the public service. That probably contributes to it. I do not know whether Mr Conran wants to make some further comment on the detail.

Mr P.F. Conran: The increase of \$6.5 million in employee benefits between the 2009–10 actual and the 2010–11 estimated actual is principally \$2.1 million for electorate officers; \$1.3 million for public sector government award 4 salary increases; \$1.2 million for executive government support; \$900 000 for Office of Native Title salaries transferred for three months; and \$700 000 for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. The

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increase of \$6.4 million in employee benefits between the 2010–11 estimated actual and the 2011–12 budget estimate is principally \$2.9 million for the Office of Native Title transfer, which is a full 12-month impact; \$1.8 million for increased policy capacity; \$700 000 for CHOGM; \$700 000 for electorate officers; and \$400 000 for PSGA5 salary increases.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That is a lot of numbers, but it does not make much sense to me. I am looking at budget year on budget year. The director general looked at the estimated actuals for 2010–11 against budget estimates. I do not think that is a fair way of looking at it. The department has not filled all its FTEs; therefore, it is not looking at the same expenditure. If we go on the budget numbers for 2010–11 to 2011–12, there is an increase of over 11 per cent in the cost of employee benefits and the FTEs go up by 12, which is just over one per cent. I am trying to get some explanation in addition to what the Premier said. The department has more people paid at a higher level, which is obviously upping the costs.

[2.20 pm]

Mr C.J. BARNETT: There is no denial of that. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting is one obvious example but also, because of the number of major decisions that the state is facing at the moment, we have increased the number of personnel in key areas. One very recent example is the community funding package of \$600 million, which is a major feature of the state budget. Much of that work was done within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. We are also working on some other major projects and we are providing a lot of support to those agencies dealing with major investment projects relating to China. There is a lot happening, and a lot of extra skills and capacities are being brought into the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to support line agencies.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I refer to page 78. To continue on the theme of the enormous community funding package and CHOGM, I would like to acknowledge that funding is one issue, but having a voice is another.

The CHAIRMAN: What line item are you on, member for Carine?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The first dot point on page 78 on CHOGM. I would like to ask what opportunities non-government organisations and the not-for-profit sector will have to make their voices heard at CHOGM.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I thank the member. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting includes what is known as the Commonwealth People's Forum. Sue Ash will act as chair of that forum. It will involve not-for-profit community-based groups and other organisations outside government discussing a range of issues. Obviously that will include issues relevant to the sector, but also a range of other issues, such as asylum seekers and refugees; all sorts of other topics could come up in that forum. We expect strong involvement from both Western Australian and Australian not-for-profit organisations. That will be one of the three major conference themes of the CHOGM event. That sector will be heavily involved, and I think there will be a fair bit of interest in what goes on there.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Is the Premier able to indicate whether the CHOGM leaders' retreat will be delivered on time and on budget?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Yes, it will; if it is not, we will have a real problem. I have driven past the Mt Eliza site and been impressed at how quickly work began on that site. To my understanding it is both on time and on budget—perhaps even below budget—and it will be a lasting asset for the state.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I want to take the Premier back to his answer to a question asked by my colleague the member for Balcatta. Did I interpret the Premier correctly as saying that there is a deliberate government policy to increase the number of personnel and the salary levels within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Treasury and Finance?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Yes, to deal with major issues. At the moment, a lot of senior —

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The people behind the Premier are very expectant, hoping that he will say yes!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: They are not all going to get a pay rise, so they can stay calm!

A lot of senior people have left the public service in recent years, and a number of agencies have therefore found things difficult. We have deliberately drawn into the Department of the Premier and Cabinet some of the most capable people in the public sector. We have recruited people from outside the public sector and they are being strategically deployed on the major issues facing the state. I can give three examples: CHOGM, funding for not-for-profit community-based organisations and the major resources projects and all the issues relating to them, including native title and a host of other factors. There is a sense of marshalling forces to have the capacity to deal with these issues all at once.

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Mr E.S. RIPPER: That means pouring more resources into those central agencies, higher salary levels and more people.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Yes, but the Leader of the Opposition describes that in a quite disparaging way. I would not use that sort of terminology or tone. We are talking about gaining a high level of expertise. We cannot sell Western Australia short. As members opposite know, and certainly the Leader of the Opposition knows, when we sit down—as I did this morning—to negotiate a major resources project, we are negotiating with some of the smartest people on the planet, including some of the best lawyers and engineers. Western Australia has to have the capacity to match them in negotiations. That has required bringing in some outstanding people, and I do not apologise for that, because if we do not, Western Australia will not get the best deal.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I refer to the third dot point on page 78, which refers to the \$10 million allocation for residents of Toodyay affected by the 2009 bushfire. Given the findings against Western Power, is it the intention of the government to recover that \$10 million from Western Power?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I do not believe that there have been findings against Western Power.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The Office of Energy, then.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, I do not think that is the case. There have been two reports from the Office of Energy that gave conflicting interpretations —

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Do they cancel each other out?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Yes, to some extent. The state government took the initiative, with Western Power, of putting together a \$10 million package of assistance, of which \$5 million came from consolidated revenue and \$5 million from Western Power. That has been paid out and I think virtually all the claims have now been settled.

Mr P.F. Conran: A total of 138 claims have been lodged; 117 payments totalling \$4.2 million have been approved, and 94 payments totalling \$4.04 million have been made. The payment amounts range from \$1 000 to a cap of \$190 000. There have been 30 claims paid for houses that were totally destroyed; four claims were limited by the \$190 000 cap; 24 claims are awaiting payment; 15 claims were excluded from the scheme; and six claims are awaiting assessment.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I might add that there was no requirement for people to give up their right to pursue legal action, if they so chose.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: I refer to the second dot point on page 78, under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. What are the key priorities for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in coordinating the implementation of the Kimberley science and conservation strategy?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I thank the member. This is probably the most important conservation issue that Western Australia is dealing with. In October last year the then Minister for Environment, Hon Donna Faragher, outlined the results of the Kimberley science and conservation strategy, which consisted of establishing four new marine parks, creating the Prince Regent River national park and a migratory corridor across the Kimberley to connect existing national parks. That work is now progressing. The Eighty Mile Beach marine park has essentially been finalised in terms of boundaries, sanctuary areas and the like. Camden Sound marine park is close to being concluded; the final issue there relates to boundaries and sanctuary zones. Other work is continuing, and the government will hopefully be in a position in the not-too-distant future to give a more detailed report on that. There are a lot of interesting aspects of this work. As members will be aware, there are cane toads and other feral species in the Kimberley. Part of this project is almost in the nature of an ark project of finding endangered species and re-establishing their populations on isolated islands so that they will be protected from feral species. The project is scientifically based and will create a collective that will be known as the Kimberley wilderness parks. I think it will be extraordinary.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: It will not be any good unless we increase the percentage of sanctuary zones reserved in Camden Sound.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I think it will be very good, and I hope that the Leader of the Opposition supports it.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: It will be mickey mouse unless we do that.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Leader of the Opposition should show us his national parks in the Kimberley.

There will also be training for Indigenous people in a range of areas and better facilities for tourism visitors. The state budget allocated \$41 million towards it. It is probably one of the most significant conservation measures ever taken in Western Australian history.

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Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I refer to page 76 and government policy management, and particularly the Premier's statement a few minutes ago about the role of DPC in the oversight or coordination of projects of major significance to the state. Can the Premier give us a list of those projects for which DPC has more than just a watching brief and is clearly taking a leadership or coordination role, or is otherwise directly involved?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Perhaps the member misunderstood me; I was not saying that DPC was taking over these major projects. We have a lead agency framework, but there are times when DPC comes in to support the agencies involved in projects, as do other agencies. It is performing the true role of a central agency not only in major development projects, but also in social areas such as the community grants scheme and the like. There is not a list as such; it works on projects on a needs basis. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet is actively involved in projects such as Oakajee. It is very heavily involved in the Browse LNG–James Price Point issue. It has also been very heavily involved in the community grants scheme. Early childhood is another area of its work. Where there are policy priorities of government, DPC tends to add, for want of a better word, a fair bit of muscle to those issues. For example; there is even an involvement from DPC in the stadium issue.

[2.30 pm]

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: What about the Perth Waterfront project and Perth City Link?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: In some of the policy formulation, yes. Perth Waterfront is under the East Perth Redevelopment Authority, EPRA —

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: EPRA or the WA Planning Commission? The budget is for the WA Planning Commission.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Sorry; both EPRA and the Planning Commission are working together. On the sinking of the rail line, there is EPRA, the Public Transport Authority and the City of Perth.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That oversight or coordination, whatever it is called, is obviously important. For instance, when the Premier first made a request of Prime Minister Rudd, he said that the total cost of Perth City Link would be in the order of \$263 million.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Sorry?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The Premier's request in his letter to Prime Minister Rudd indicated that the estimated total cost was \$263 million. We now see, in terms of the component cost in different parts of the budget under different agencies, in the order of \$768 million. It has blown out by \$500 million from the original ask.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I think the member is wrong. The request to the commonwealth was originally for \$263 million, which the state would essentially match. The project has —

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That is not what the Premier's letter said.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: That is what it was—it was half and half. What we requested from the commonwealth was \$263 million. The project is more expensive now, principally because the scale of the project has increased. It was the commonwealth that actually suggested we include sinking the bus port as well. That had always been considered, but the state's proposal to the commonwealth was to sink the railway, not the bus port. The commonwealth came back and said, "We believe the bus port sinking should be included", so we accepted that. That increased the total value of the project.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I am trying to get some idea of what the final cost will be. In last year's budget there was a line saying the estimated total cost was \$656.3 million. From adding up different parts of the budget, if we put the City of Perth's money and land in, that is \$768 million. It has grown by over \$100 million in the past 12 months. Can the Premier give us a breakdown of all the costs and what the final figure will be? I realise we will possibly recoup some on land, but what is the actual full cost of the development?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: One major contract has been let; others are to be let. I suggest that question would be properly addressed to the Minister for Planning, who has overall carriage of that project.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The issue is that we have two different government agencies plus the City of Perth —

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No; ask the Minister for Planning. Indeed, the Minister for Planning —

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Premier appears at all the photo opportunities!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It is a project in the planning portfolio.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: All these high-paid bureaucrats in DPC are all care and no responsibility. No-one is actually keeping tabs on a \$500 million blow-out in the Premier's project.

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Mr C.J. BARNETT: There is not a \$500 million blow-out at all.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I can show the Premier his letter to the Prime Minister; I have it here. It says “\$263 million total estimated cost”. Not part—“total estimated cost”. I realise the scope has shifted, but now it is \$768 million. There is a \$500 million increase in costs.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The member is totally wrong. I suggest he ask that question of the minister for —

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Who takes responsibility for it?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I take responsibility for everything that happens in this government.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: But the Premier will not answer questions about the components of the cost.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Because the question properly belongs with the Minister for Planning. This is an estimates committee. That project is not in my direct line of responsibility.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I take the Premier to the line item relating to the average cost per ministerial office on page 80 of the *Budget Statements*. One ministerial office cost is when there is a technical change of government, as when the reshuffle occurred in December, and various people take payouts from their term-of-government contracts. I refer to the payout to Mr Blair Stratton of \$83 000. He spent five years and 150 days in his position. It would be interesting to know how that payout was calculated. Does the Premier think it proper that Mr Stratton worked in the Minister for Energy’s office, gets a payout, and then, some months later, pops up again as the general manager, strategy and corporate affairs at Synergy in the same minister’s portfolio? Does the Premier think it proper that he received the payout and then popped up in that position in a government-owned enterprise in that very same minister’s portfolio?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Blair Stratton was a term-of-government employee. I think the Leader of the Opposition quoted the figure he had worked over five years. He worked in the opposition office and then worked in the Minister for Energy’s office. When he left, he received the payout that he was entitled to, for his total length of service, not just his service in the ministerial office.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: That is the five years and 150 days.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Yes. That is why the quantum is as is. The Leader of the Opposition is not doing so, but others might jump to the conclusion that was a payout for his time since this government has been in office. It was not; it reflects his time also in opposition over a number of years. I thought the Leader of the Opposition was going to ask a question about his now working in a senior position within Synergy. I do not see that as a conflict of interest. I think that was the point of the question —

Mr E.S. RIPPER: No; I asked whether it was proper that he gets the payout and pops up again in the public sector, broadly speaking.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: When a public servant leaves government—by that I mean the public service itself—there is a six-month limitation on his or her returning to a job anywhere within the public service. That is the question I thought the Leader of the Opposition was going to ask. In this case that rule does not apply to government trading enterprises. If a public servant leaves, for whatever reason, he or she cannot come back. If redundancy is taken, he or she cannot come back into the public service within six months. But that applies only to the public service as such. It does not include government trading enterprises. What has happened with Mr Stratton is exactly correct. I make the observation—this is no reflection on Mr Stratton or his appointment—I think that is an error in the rules. I think the exclusion zone, if we like, of six months should apply to both the public service as such and government trading enterprises. That is something I intend to correct. I think a six-month gap should apply across the board.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: I refer to the sixth dot point on page 77 of the *Budget Statements* referring to “promoting and protecting Western Australia’s interests within the Federation”. Could the Premier indicate what the government is doing to combat a declining share of GST payments from the commonwealth over the forward estimates?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: That issue is consuming a great deal of government time and resources and the issues of commonwealth–state relations. As Premier, I have a responsibility for commonwealth–state relations, although obviously in this case Treasury and the Treasurer have almost an equal role. The requirements of commonwealth–state relations have been very demanding. The GST issue, which has been debated widely in the community and widely understood, has only been part of it. A huge amount of effort is still going into the so-called health reforms. Although in a clinical and technical sense that sits primarily with the health minister, a lot of the ongoing negotiations through the Council of Australian Governments are coordinated through Premier and Cabinet. There are also negotiations over the resource super profits tax and the mineral resource rent tax, and probably, in the future, over disability insurance schemes and the like. The active agenda—not necessarily a

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good agenda—of the commonwealth government demands a huge resource component. There are lots of significant meetings outside COAG itself, of senior members of the respective bureaucracies around Australia. Health is still unresolved after a year. I guess that is the main task. Again, we need good people and people with experience in commonwealth–state relations. We are fortunate to have Mr Conran, who knows both sides of the Nullarbor fence.

[2.40 pm]

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I would like to follow up on that question from the member for Riverton. The federal government has agreed to a review of the GST. The state government has put forward the proposition that there should be a floor of 75 per cent, below which any state's share of the GST cannot fall. Given that this is not so much a state versus commonwealth issue as a state versus state issue, what discussions has the Premier had with other states about this review? Has the Premier been able to secure, for example, the support of Mr Barry O'Farrell, or of the Premier of Victoria, on the proposition that he is putting to this review?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Leader of the Opposition describes it as a state versus state issue. With respect, I think that is the lowest level of argument on this issue.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: That is the level that usually kills off the issue, because that is why it failed before.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Okay. There are elements within the commonwealth who in a very patronising way make jokes about states' rights and buckets of money. A senior federal minister made a crack about that the other day at a CHOGM announcement, which I thought was totally inappropriate. I think that if the Australian federation is to survive and prosper, this discussion needs to go a bit beyond that. I expect that there will be a mature and sensible discussion. I have not spoken to the other state Premiers about that since it was announced. But, obviously, I think we will see a fairly close alignment between Western Australia and Queensland. The other states are also dissatisfied with the Commonwealth Grants Commission mechanism for different reasons. So to the extent that there have been discussions—they have not gone anywhere; most of them were at COAG—there is probably a fairly common or growing view among most state Premiers at least, and most state Treasurers, that the GST should be allocated primarily on a per capita basis. There should be a simple per capita formula, with maybe the commonwealth retaining some portion that can be used to support the weaker states. That is what I hope we are moving towards—a per capita type formula.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I take the Premier's earlier answer to indicate that he has had no one-on-one discussions with other Premiers to secure their support for his proposal, and that his director general has had no discussions with directors general in other state governments to secure their support, and it is similarly the case for the Treasurer and the Under Treasurer. Has anyone in the state government done anything to secure the support of other states for the Premier's reform proposal?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I think that explains one of the differences between the Leader of the Opposition and me. The Leader of the Opposition immediately sees it as a numbers game. I see it as a policy issue for Australia.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Then how about persuading them on a policy basis?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I obviously had a discussion with the Prime Minister in detail; in fact, before she announced that, I had a long discussion with her, face to face, about that. I have also had a brief telephone conversation with Nick Greiner, who, along with John Brumby, will be heading up the inquiry. They will be coming to Perth in the not-too-distant future, and that is what I see as the start of that process. So I am not trying to pre-empt or grandstand about it. I hope we get a sensible discussion, and I hope that will lead to a system basically based on population.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: If I could follow up on that, when a previous government took up this issue, it took it up on the basis of a substantial report prepared by Ross Garnaut and Vince FitzGerald, which demonstrated that there was a national interest, not just a Western Australian interest, in changing the system. That report was commissioned by the New South Wales, Victorian and Western Australian Governments acting together. Despite the weight of that report, the then federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, said that unless all the states agreed, he was not going to do anything. Does the government have in mind any sophisticated push for reform, based on commissioning modelling and reaching a policy understanding with the other states, which, quite frankly, have the political capacity to scuttle the reform?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The director general has just advised me that he has had some discussions with other directors general. Preliminary work is taking place. As to modelling, I am sure a lot of modelling will be done of the scenarios. If this process—which has yet to begin—begins with states lining up against states, it will fail. There is absolutely no doubt about that. It will fail.

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Mr E.S. RIPPER: What is the Premier doing to head that off?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I have just told the Leader of the Opposition what I am doing. I am staying calm. I have put out an argument for a floor from Western Australia's perspective. I have also made the comment, as I just did, that a system that is based basically on population is a fair and simple way to go. I think the other Premiers are reasonably receptive to that. But we have yet to start the process. This is not being rushed by the commonwealth government. Indeed, I would argue that it is going too slowly. The commonwealth government is going to let this run through until after the federal election. We see this as a long-term fundamental reform. I hope that we will get an agreement on policy before we start a bickering process. The commonwealth would probably love nothing better than for the states to start bickering among themselves. But maybe commonwealth-state relations, at least in this regard, have risen above that.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I refer to page 80, the heading "Services and Key Efficiency Indicators", and the seventh dot point, management of the state occasions and official visits program. Would the Australia Day Skyworks fall under the province of state occasions; and would any changes to the Australia Day Skyworks be managed under this part of the budget?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am not sure whether the Australia Day Skyworks is a state occasion, but it certainly is a popular occasion! There have been problems in preceding years. We had a situation probably three years ago when there was a lot of violent behaviour and arrests, and I think there was a glassing incident that was particularly horrific. At that time, the Commissioner of Police seemed to take the view that there would be no tolerance of alcohol. That was a principled position. The only problem was that people stayed away from Skyworks in their thousands. That seemed to me to compromise the success of reducing the amount of alcohol consumed at that event. I suggested, and others supported me, that we trial the use of designated areas in which alcohol could be consumed. There was some criticism about that, but eventually everyone came to the party—the police, the City of Perth, the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority Board, and the state government. I do not normally go to the Skyworks, but I went to the last one. I walked through the crowds of people on the river foreshore for half an hour or so before the Skyworks began, and I saw nothing but orderly groups of people—family groups, groups of young people—having a glass of wine, having a beer, behaving well and enjoying the night. I think that was a successful trial, and I hope it becomes a permanent feature. It was very successful. There were some incidents, but not to any great extent, and the crowd numbers have recovered. That is a good example of not over-reacting, but realising that what was happening in terms of violence and antisocial behaviour was not acceptable; and the people who went to the Skyworks accepted that and probably a lot of the hoons and hooligans stayed away.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I refer to page 78, the fifth dot point, which states that the department will assist relevant agencies to coordinate water planning needs around the state. Can the Premier give some indication of how that expertise within the department has been obtained? Is it a small group, or is it an individual with experience and expertise? I am not asking for the person's name, but I would like to get some idea. Premier Gallop actually brought in a young man who was very competent. He has since left the department and has gone on to take a much more senior role at the Water Corporation. How is this expertise acquired within the department to enable it to look at water planning needs around the state?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I do not know whether this is the point of the Leader of the Opposition's question, but we are taking a different approach from the one that Premier Gallop followed. I am not making a political comment here. He brought a number of functions into the department of Premier and Cabinet, such as road safety, the water unit, and various other units. That is not something that this government wants to do. We have sent all those roles back to their mainstream agencies. Climate change still lies within the environment portfolio. This fits under the umbrella of commonwealth-state relations, for pretty obvious reasons. In that sense, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is involved in looking at federal proposals on climate change, carbon taxes and the like, and it works with Treasury, the Department of Environment and other affected agencies. Obviously, part of that is water. I think most of us would probably agree that water is a most serious long-term issue that this state faces. The primary responsibility for water and water policy lies with the Minister for Water and his agencies. However, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet gets involved because of the commonwealth-state links in this area.

[2.50 pm]

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I understand what the Premier said but that was not my question.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I thought it was a good answer.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I accept what the Premier said; it is correct. If the Department of the Premier and Cabinet has a coordinating role in water planning needs around the state, which is what it says in the *Budget Statements*,

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does it have an officer to provide that coordinating role, and what competence or experience does that officer have?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: “Coordinating” might not be the best choice of words. The department is not taking over the water role; that lies with the minister. Water can affect other portfolios, and there is an overarching role with federal–state relations. I will ask Mr Conran to comment.

Mr P.F. Conran: We have officers in our strategic policy area with quite a deal of experience in water issues.

Mr P. PAPALIA: For advisers to speak —

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: We are not trying to be overly prescriptive but it is within the standing orders.

The CHAIRMAN: Premier, I think the point they are making is that you should invite the adviser to speak.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I did refer to the adviser.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: You need to invite them, Mr Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN: I do not think that I need to invite the advisers to speak; the Premier has to invite the advisers to speak.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I understand that under this revised format we have been following over the past couple of years, I can defer to Mr Conran.

Mr P.F. Conran: In relation to water issues, we work closely with the Water Corporation, the Department of Water, the Department of Environment and Conservation, Treasury and all the other agencies. We have a couple of quite experienced officers in our strategic policy group. One has previously had experience with the Department of Water and in the operation of government trading enterprises. The other has a very extensive environmental background. They are very experienced in the area, they are assisting the respective agencies and they sit on various committees that are looking at these sorts of issues. In that sense, we are coordinating and ensuring that issues that need to come to cabinet are coming there in a timely fashion as well.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I thank the Premier for seeking the assistance of Mr Conran to answer my question. I would like some understanding of the aborted decision to put hundreds of millions of dollars into the Burrup desalination plant. It has now been cancelled because it rained. Was that decision driven from DPP or from the Water Corporation?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The major factor in the decision to delay, perhaps postpone or perhaps cancel the building of the desalination plant was simply rainfall. The dams in the Pilbara are full. The urgency of that project is no longer there. The point has been raised in this house. It was an expensive project for a relatively small amount of water and to some extent a rushed project to meet what was seen to be a potential crisis. The rains came, so the crisis went and we have simply taken that back. That decision was taken through Water, Treasury and Premier and Cabinet. There was mutual agreement that we did not need to rush into that project.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: My question did not relate to the Premier’s friend upstairs helping him with the cancellation; it related to what I suggested was very poor planning, which led him to take a high-cost solution because nothing had been done for two years. Is DPC getting in to make sure that agencies are delivering in a timely way so that the planning can go ahead and the government can get a cheaper cost option rather than running up against an emergency and having to go for a higher cost option?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Not as such. As the member knows, all decisions like that come through cabinet. There are some issues in the state relating to longer term planning of infrastructure across a number of service areas such as water, energy and waste disposal. For the member’s information, because he may not be aware of this, one of the roles of Anne Nolan, who is now the head of the newly established Department of Finance, given her particular expertise, will be to overview some of the long-term capital investment programs of the GTEs. It is not a direct functional role working on particular projects but, on behalf of government, running a skilful eye over their investment plans.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Is the issue of recycling water something that DPC is taking an interest in or is it just leaving it to the agencies?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It is taking an interest in a broad policy sense. Again, that is simply because of all these issues of climate change, such as water and recycling. That will predominantly be driven by the Minister for Water.

The CHAIRMAN: Before we carry on, I will read out standing order 230 for the information of members. It states —

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Advisers who are present at an estimates committee to assist Ministers will not directly answer questions or otherwise address the committee except with the approval of and in the presence of a Minister or Parliamentary Secretary.

The Premier needs to give his advisers permission to answer questions, not me. In any event, there is an old Latin maxim that says “de minimis non curat lex”, which means that the law does not worry about piddly little matters. We will carry on.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I refer to the comments of the member for Fremantle to *The Sunday Times*, in which she said —

“I went to the Premier seeking an additional staff member,” ...

“He said, ‘Yes, on the condition that you don’t block supply and you don’t support a vote of no-confidence in the Government.

So far the member for Fremantle seems to have adhered to that deal. Has the member for Fremantle received her additional staff member in return for her to vote on supply and for her not to vote against the government on motions of no confidence?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I cannot see where that appears in the budget papers.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: It appears under “Parliamentary Electorate Offices” on page 75.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The assertion made by the Leader of the Opposition is not correct. We have debated this matter in this Parliament and I have made a statement to that effect. I do not intend to go back and visit that. In response to his actual question as to whether the member for Fremantle has been allocated an additional staff member: no, not at this stage.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Is there provision in this budget for the member for Fremantle to receive an additional staff member? Is the Premier saying that she will not receive an additional staff member in the next financial year in the budget that we are discussing?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The member for Fremantle and I have not discussed that issue this year, from memory. The way that the member for Fremantle was treated by her former colleagues in the Greens was absolutely disgraceful, and I suspect she would rather not know about the issue. That is up to her. She has not come back to me and sought an extra staffer. The principle—it is not laid down in any regulation—is that we have allocated a third staff member to Independent members. But the member for Fremantle has not approached me in recent times.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Is the Premier saying that the member for Kalgoorlie and the member for Alfred Cove each have an additional staff member?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: They do.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Is there any other Independent member of Parliament?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The member for Churchlands does not have an additional staff member. She is a minister. We also allocated additional staff resources to the Greens, which is not laid down in the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal regulations.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Is the Premier ruling out an additional staff member for the member for Fremantle in this financial year?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, I am not, because she has not approached me about that this year.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Is the Premier saying that that allocation is within the parliamentary electorate offices allocation or is it within another allocation?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: To my knowledge, there is no allocation for that extra position.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The Premier said there were two members —

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Sorry, there are the existing ones. I would have to ask the advisers where that shows up. Where is funding for additional staff for the Greens and Independents in the lower house included? I am advised that it comes under parliamentary electorate offices funding.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I refer to the first dot point on page 78 of budget paper No 2, which relates to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. It is great to see that the not-for-profit sector will have an opportunity to participate in that discussion. How will the people of Perth be able to experience this once-in-a-lifetime CHOGM event?

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Mr C.J. BARNETT: I thank the member for the question. The community at large, including the media, is now getting quite excited about CHOGM. It is an enormously complex logistical exercise, involving security and other measures. The contemplation of having up to 53 presidents and prime ministers in the one spot at the one time, all with their own needs and security considerations and all dealing with issues in their respective countries that can occur during CHOGM, makes for a lot of complexity.

For public participation, there are several proposed elements. There will be international sporting competitions, such as an international netball competition, which will include a test between the top two countries, Australia and New Zealand. International men's and women's hockey tournaments will take place, a program of arts and cultural activities will be held in the cultural centre, and a public concert is yet to be finalised. If the member would like, I will ask the director of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Mr Muirhead, to add anything that I have omitted.

[3.00 pm]

Mr R. Muirhead: There are quite a few other things. We are looking at setting up a trail of art, which will be created by the Nomad Two Worlds project, which was initiated by Russel James. There will be opportunities also for the Western Australian public to participate in some of the forums, particularly the people's forum and the youth forum, which cut to the core of some of the policy debate around CHOGM. In addition, on the Friday there will be opportunities for people to view not only the motorcade carrying the 53 commonwealth leaders, but also the Queen on her journey to or from the opening of CHOGM, which will be quite an event in itself. On that Friday, the people's space, which will be the centre of the cultural festival, will be quite an active area in which people can congregate on the public holiday.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I refer to government policy management on page 81 of the *Budget Statements*. I assume that the government still intends to reduce the number of committees and boards in government from 1 300 to 600. How many of the 477 committees that were defined away from being a committee are still in existence?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I read a brief ministerial statement on that and I refer the member to it. That is a record of this matter. I understand and accept the member's comment. Although he said that a number of committees would be "defined away", that was not the intention. There are a range of government bodies of different standing. Some were created by statute, others were established by governments and agencies, some had external people and some were purely internal. We expect to have working groups and committees within government. When making a decision on this issue, we considered that for this purpose a "committee" is best defined as those committees that have an external member and for which people receive a payment, otherwise it would include the hundreds of committees within government. One of the problems was that "government committee" was never properly defined. A number of committees have disappeared and a lot more are intended to be abolished. Many of them will require statutory change, and I hope that members opposite will support that. We may well introduce an omnibus bill to abolish them. A number of committees in the building trades are disappearing. Almost every fish, and certainly every vegetable and fruit, has a committee. I do not know whether that is necessary. It seems to me that many of the committees are performing the role that industry groups themselves should perform. I do not believe that taxpayers should fund industry groups to sort out their problems about how to best represent their industry. These industry groups hark back to the past. A couple of weeks ago the Minister for Planning made a statement about the Kwinana industrial area and the reduction in the number of committees from five to one. This is an ongoing task. I would like to it to happen quicker but, as I said, much of it will require statutory change. As of 3 May 2011 there were 648 listed boards and committees.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: That is 20 more than as at 19 May 2010.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It could be.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Tabled paper 2104 says that there are 628. How many of the 477 boards and committees listed on tabled paper 2104 under "definition" still exist?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Some of them may exist but be defunct and others may have been transferred to having no membership other than a public servant. We will continue with this process and at some stage I will provide an updated report. As I said, because of the legal standing of a number of the bodies that exist, we will have to bring legislation before Parliament to abolish them.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I have a final question. Can the Premier provide a list of the 26 boards and committees listed under the Department of Health that require legislative change? I understand there is no agreement from either the Department of Health or Minister for Health to abolish those boards.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: In Health?

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Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Yes.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The member should ask the Minister for Health. It is not for me to say.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Either it is government policy or it is not.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Ask the Minister for Health, because Health is a separate item. I am not being evasive. I am just saying that it is a health issue and that the member should ask the Minister for Health. The member will find that many of the boards and committees set up in Health were set up because of public health issues. They relate to qualifications and accreditation and all sorts of things. Some exist because of commonwealth–state arrangements. I suggest that the member direct his question to the Minister for Health, who would be only too happy to answer it.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Would it help if I clarified my question? If it was difficult for the Premier to understand my question, I apologise.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I will not answer it; the Minister for Health will answer it. It is not my portfolio.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: If my question was not clear, I am very happy to rephrase it to make it clear. I refer to government policy management on page 81 of the *Budget Statements*. Of the 26 boards and committees that were listed on tabled paper 2104 for abolition, does it remain the government's intention to abolish those committees, and can the Premier provide me with a list of those committees?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I do not believe that the government has ever provided or produced a list of committees to be abolished. That has been handled individually by the ministers.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: See tabled paper 2015.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: If the member is interested in the health portfolio, he should ask the Minister for Health.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I ask this question in the context of resentment among lower paid public sector workers about the wage offers that have been made to them. We know that directors general got a special increase courtesy of the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal, and we will ask the tribunal about that when it comes before us shortly. Can the Premier provide an explanation of what happened to cause an increase in the salary rates of chiefs of staff across government, and what process was followed to achieve that outcome? The history, as I see it, is that once the chiefs of staff found out about the high salaries the Premier was paying Mr Pontifex and Mr Wedgwood, the Premier had a morale problem and made a political decision to address it. Perhaps the Premier could explain his rationale for that special pay increase for chiefs of staff and ministerial officers.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: That is the Leader of the Opposition's summation. A proposal for the reclassification of 16 chiefs of staff and a principal policy officer in the Premier's office was considered and recommended by the Ministerial Merit Panel on 23 March 2011. The Ministerial Merit Panel took into account the classification of similar policy positions across the public sector, most being at director level positions of class 1 and, in particular, senior policy positions in the central public sector agencies. The panel also considered comparative salary rates in other jurisdictions and challenges in recruiting and retaining experienced staff in a competitive market. This is an issue that the government faces in many areas of public sector employment. Many private employers face exactly the same issue. When there are demands in the community or opportunities in the private sector for particular skills, it is always difficult for government to retain employees. That was an issue in that area. It is an issue in other areas such as planning, environmental assessment and project development, and it also affects State Development, Transport, and a range of other agencies. There is no doubt that in a number of categories it is difficult to retain staff in this current environment.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: How did the Ministerial Merit Panel come to examine this issue? Who asked the panel to consider that matter?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Formally, I do not know the answer to that. I was certainly aware of the issue and I imagine that it probably came from my office. I do not have any difficulty with that if that is the case; it probably did. The issue of salary levels would have been discussed within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and would have been quite properly referred to the merit panel to assess.

[3.10 pm]

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Do I understand the Premier to be saying that, on his authority, the Ministerial Merit Panel had a special examination of salary rates for chiefs of staff?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I do not think there was any formal communication, but there was an issue and the merit panel considered it. I do not see anything wrong with that.

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Mr E.S. RIPPER: Did the Premier discuss it with someone?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, I did not; no, not outside.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: How did it happen? The Premier knew there was a problem and, by osmosis, somebody took action; is that right?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: My chief of staff—I do not know—may have discussed it with the Director General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet; he may have discussed it with the Public Sector Commissioner. That is fine. It went to the merit panel and the merit panel made the decision.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I have a follow-up question. There is an interesting anomaly in the Minister for Education's office, whereby a former chief of staff, now a policy coordinator—namely, Mr Rutherford—has been earning more than the minister's chief of staff. How does that happen?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Sorry; who?

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Mr Rutherford, who was formerly the minister's chief of staff and who now has the title of policy coordinator. I am not sure if it is current as of now, but he has been earning more and has been paid at a higher level—class 1 versus level 9—than the minister's chief of staff. How does that happen, and what exactly does a policy coordinator do that makes that person more highly remunerated than a chief of staff?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Well, I think it is fair enough for the Leader of the Opposition to ask about Mr Rutherford's appointment. I am not going to express my view about comparative salaries. One person's opinion is simply one person's opinion.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: But the Premier is the employer.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, no; I am not the employer. The employer, in Western Australia now, is the Public Sector Commissioner.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: So does he make the determination that Mr Rutherford is going to be paid class 1?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The member for Warnbro sniggers, but that is one of the most important reforms that this government has made.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Sniggers! I am laughing at the Premier absolving himself of responsibility; that is what I am doing.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No; one of the important reforms that this government undertook was to create a Public Sector Commissioner and make the Public Sector Commissioner the employer, and remove that person from the influence of the Premier. That was a fundamental reform that perhaps the member does not comprehend.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: So perhaps when the Public Sector Commissioner comes in I can ask him why he made the decision to pay Mr Rutherford at class 1.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I did not make that decision at all with respect to Mr Rutherford. Mr Rutherford was recommended for the position of executive director. Is the Leader of the Opposition asking why he is paid more in the minister's office than the chief of staff?

Mr E.S. RIPPER: That is right, yes. He now has the title of policy coordinator. He is a former chief of staff. He went to the new position of policy coordinator and he gets paid more than the chief of staff. What is the justification for that?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Well, I guess I do not have an answer for that as such; I was not involved with that appointment. But I could imagine a situation in which someone could be paid more than a chief of staff. There are literally dozens, if not maybe 100 people, in the public service who are paid more than the Premier. It is true.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Minister for Education apparently has an acting chief of staff. How long has that been the case and what recruitment process is underway to fill the position?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The minister has an acting chief of staff. He had been working in the minister's office and she feels that he is capable of being acting chief of staff; whether he becomes the permanent chief of staff is primarily a matter for the minister.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: So is there no recruitment process underway?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: For the moment he continues in an acting role, and I think he is doing a good job. He is a relatively young officer and I think that is a factor. Given his age and level of experience, I think he is doing a very good job.

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Mr E.S. RIPPER: It is all very curious.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I do not find it curious; the Leader of the Opposition might. We must bear in mind that we are talking about term-of-government employees. This is the political side of government, which we have clearly separated from the public sector side of government, and I think that is a good reform. So, yes, the Leader of the Opposition can be critical of ministerial officers, but ministerial officers are political officers, and the important thing is not that they are political, but that they are separated from the mainstream public service.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: I will follow up, in part, on the question the Leader of the Opposition just raised and a matter the Premier raised earlier. It is related to the heading “Services and Key Efficiency Indicators” on page 80 of budget paper No 2 and the administration of executive government. One of the problems governments have, particularly with the shortage of labour, is obtaining very experienced people. That is an across-government issue, particularly, I would argue, in the area of economic development. Does the government have any program to bring young people in and train them through the system through cadetships or something like that? Treasury used to do it, but not anymore.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: There are programs, and perhaps that question is better directed to the Public Sector Commission, which does have programs, obviously, for recruitment, training, retraining and professional development. Each individual department will have its own work in that area across government, and it is probably more a question for the Public Sector Commission.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: My question is related to page 76 of budget paper No 2, under the heading “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, of which there are a significant number. The first dot point relates to the partnership forum. Obviously, the sustainability of the community sector is about more than just providing funding to that sector. I am interested in finding out a bit more about how the partnership forum will contribute to achieving improved outcomes in the community sector.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I thank the member. The partnership forum consists of the heads of the major government agencies, such as the Disability Services Commission and the Mental Health Commission and so on, and the heads of the major not-for-profit community-based organisations, such as Senses Foundation and all the others. They have been working away since the middle of last year. The policy announcements on community funding in the budget did not come out of thin air; they were developed in cooperation with that sector. Therefore, there is a strong element of mutual ownership between government agencies and non-government agencies, which is why I am very optimistic that this will prove to be successful. Less recognised is the fact that I have also had a regular dialogue with the heads of churches in Western Australia. One of the budget announcements relates to, basically, a crash centre for the homeless—mainly men—in the central city area that was called for. That was a direct suggestion from the heads of churches, and I think around \$3 million was allocated to establish that. We have had this dialogue with community-based organisations, with churches and other groups, going on over a long period, and we have mutually developed policies. The important thing is that these are not policies imposed on the sector by government; they have come from government agencies and primarily from the sector itself. I just make the interesting observation that the objective is to improve service levels and continuity of service for people who need assistance in our community. The direct beneficiaries in a sense will, however, be employees, 36 000 of whom will receive better pay and conditions as a result. One of the problems has been turnover. I think the average turnover is about 25 per cent a year; in some cases it may have been higher. There has been a high level of turnover, which means high levels of recruitment costs and training. We should bear in mind that many people have to be given training in dealing with medical emergencies; most will not be medically qualified. For the people who receive assistance, such as a carer for a child, it takes a long time for that carer and child to develop trust and be able to communicate. If there is turnover, obviously it is very hard for the child or the family. So that is why that is being done. I am not against the unions in this sector, but maybe the irony has escaped the wider community that the substantial improvements in pay and conditions for the 36 000 people working in the community sector were delivered through the partnership forum, not by union activity. That is an interesting observation.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I have a follow-up question on that same issue.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Cannington and then the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I have a follow-up question on that. I understand that in future years the payments will be structured, with a category 1 payment now, and a category 2 payment later. What criteria will be used to decide which organisations will get the category 2 payment?

[3.20 pm]

Mr C.J. BARNETT: All the organisations—there are well over 300—will get an immediate across-the-board 15 per cent increase from 1 July, which, for some of them, such as Activ Foundation, will perhaps be a

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\$4 million increase a year. There will be, on average, a further 10 per cent increase two years later, and that will be tied to reform on both the community-based side and the government side. I will ask Rebecca Brown to comment further on the criteria. Ms Brown has come from Treasury to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and has worked on this program for close to a year. I will ask her to comment on the criteria for that second round of payments.

Mrs R.A. Brown: The organisations that will be eligible for the second payment of an average of 10 per cent will be determined over the next two years in partnership between line agencies and community sector organisations. They will work jointly both to ascertain need and to progress those reforms. The first tranche in the payment recognises an up-front need for many organisations; it is a flat rate. The second payment will be targeted to those organisations that have a greater need through both the price of the services that they deliver and the structure of the services that they deliver. It will be a joint arrangement over the next two years between line agencies and community sector organisations both to address need and to progress reform to get better outcomes and a more sustainable sector with services going forward.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I am particularly interested in this issue. I am on the board of a non-government organisation in my electorate, as I am sure are many other members. It is a very small NGO and the fear is that the second-round payments will favour larger NGOs. Smaller NGOs may well face the same wage-cost pressure if the Australian Services Union is successful in its wages campaign. What advice or suggestion can the Premier give us about that?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I will ask Ms Brown to comment.

Mrs R.A. Brown: In addition to the funding that was provided for price adjustments for contracts for state-purchased services, the government also allocated \$18 million for implementation. That includes the establishment of a unit within the Department of Treasury and Finance both to progress the contracting reforms and to support line agencies and community sector organisations. That will work across all organisations, from large not-for-profit organisations to smaller organisations. Certainly, that unit will work closely with a number of peak organisations, including the Western Australian Council of Social Service, National Disability Services and the Western Australian Association for Mental Health, that represent all those organisations. Certainly, as we move to a more sustainable price arrangement for our contracts with those organisations, it will pick up the larger and the smaller organisations. There is recognition in progressing these reforms that it is about building capacity in both sectors to move to a mature relationship with that contract and to get better outcomes. Through that unit and that relationship, it will certainly address the needs of smaller organisations.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: On the same issue, I noted the Premier's reference to tens of thousands of people getting improved wages without union action, which reference I think ignored the imminent Fair Work Australia ruling being pursued by the Australian Services Union. Given that that was the policy objective, why did the Premier not require the non-government organisations to pay the increased wages that he is now funding? Will his failure to do that potentially create a number of problems? For example, an industrial dispute is now affecting a particular disability services organisation because the workers know that the money is there and the organisation is not handing it over. Will it not also create a problem if the organisations spend the money on something else and then the Fair Work Australia ruling comes down and they have to spend it on wages? If some organisations nevertheless continue to pay low wages, will there not be vastly increased turnover—burn and churn—in their workforce as people move to the non-government organisations that have done the right thing with the money that the Premier says has been allocated for wages? How can he say that it has been allocated for wages and then not make it a condition?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I have not said that.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: That was the whole justification.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, it was not at all, and this is where we have a huge philosophical difference. Can I correct one thing that has come back to me? I spoke at a joint meeting of the Australian Services Union and one other union. A number of people in the audience raised with me the issue of wage levels in the not-for-profit community sector. That was well over a year ago. I said that I heard what they were saying and would take it into account. To get back to the point that the Leader of the Opposition has made, these are non-government organisations. They have their own independent boards, and it is up to them to decide how they will spend this extra funding. However, all the organisations that I have spoken to have said that most of it will go on improved pay and conditions for their employees, because their biggest problem is staff turnover and an inability to attract and retain the sort of staff whom the people they help require. But there is no compulsion on that.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Premier is moving towards a reform whereby he is going to pay these organisations for outcomes. Given that he is going to pay them for outcomes, and he has diagnosed the need for an outcome of better wages in this sector —

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Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, I have not.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: In the Premier's earlier comments, he was boasting to the committee that tens of thousands of people have got improved wages without union action. Then when I pressed him on making it happen, he said that that is not what it is about at all.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, I did not say that; do not put words in my mouth. The Leader of the Opposition can make his point and I will make my point; that is fair enough. The organisations that I have spoken to have said that most of this money will go into improved wages and conditions, but that will be a decision made by their boards. The extra 15 per cent in the first round of increased funding is in the context of existing service agreements with state government agencies. It is not just a sack of money delivered to the door; it is increased funding within the terms of the agreements that they have with government bodies.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: What is the state government's policy approach should an organisation do something else with the money and then get caught short by a Fair Work Australia ruling? If that organisation comes to the government, what will be the government's response?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: That will be their decision. We are dealing with organisations that have credibility —

Mr E.S. RIPPER: So there will be no help for them if they come to the government?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: We are dealing with organisations that have credibility, as exemplified by them having service agreements with government departments. They have passed that test and are under that continuing relationship with the Disability Services Commission or the housing authority or whichever department it might be. We are not talking about organisations that do not have proper accountability and reporting, although one of the important points of the second round of funding will be a simplification of the agreements to reduce the number. Some organisations, such as Anglicare, have more than 30 agreements across a range of government departments. We want to bring those together into if not a single agreement, then fewer agreements. We also want to reduce the amount of time, effort and money that is spent on reporting and accounting. One very practical example that was made independently of this process was to provide funding for Foodbank through the Department of Education. Three or four different agencies provided money and grants to Foodbank. That was clearly inefficient and confusing for everyone. That money will now be channelled through the education department; the education department has the relationship with Foodbank because of the breakfast programs and the like. Similar commonsense—I do not like the word “rationalisation”—reforms will take place.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Is the intention to allow NGOs to bank the increased grant payments if that is what they choose to do?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I do not think any NGO will bank it. They work within existing service agreements and they have a very strong interest in sharing in the second round of financial payments, so they will all actively engage. Again, this is a mutually developed approach to helping 400 000 Western Australians, 120 000 of whom have a severe disability or multiple disabilities.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: There is reference on page 80 to the cost of entitlements per member of Parliament and the cost of support for members of Parliament. The member for Riverton earlier asked about development and training costs, which actually fall under the Public Sector Commission, and the Premier alluded to that. I agree with that. This is the area that would contain any money for training and professional development for ministerial officers, electorate officers and members of Parliament. Can the Premier indicate whether there is any money for those three categories; and, if so, how much?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I will ask the director general or one of his staff to comment on that. There are professional development programs for electorate officers and there is also professional development within the public sector at large. I am not aware of a lot that may have been done within ministerial offices, but obviously ministers might do media programs. Frankly, someone might be able to think of an example, as I cannot think of one.

[3.30 pm]

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That would come out of the ministerial office. This is where the government has budgeted—if it has—for any professional development training across those three particular areas.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Those areas being?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Ministerial officers, electorate officers and members of Parliament.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It certainly happens for electorate officers. I will ask the director general to provide details.

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Mr G.J. Moore: Members may be aware of the electorate officers' conference held on 31 March and 1 April. As a result of that process, there was some feedback from longstanding electorate officers who did not attend that particular conference, and who argued that they had already attended similar conferences, that there was perhaps a better way of disseminating some training effort. We are currently looking at that as a result of the feedback from that conference, and we are looking at some options about how that might occur. In running that conference, the department said that it would present a report, which is being drafted. That report will be presented to both the Premier and the Presiding Officers. Some of the options that might be considered include, under certain circumstances, working with electorate officers to determine the type of training they need. That could arguably be delivered in some of the regions; it might be a better way of doing what we have traditionally done by bringing them down —

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Through the Premier, I simply want to know if there is a quantum of money, or if the departments are going to find money when they have a proposal.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I do not have that information.

Mr G.J. Moore: There is no set quantum that we would discern across the 95 members of Parliament. Traditionally, we have tried to have conferences, but there is now a move to perhaps get some better value for the dollar spent there.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I return to non-government organisations and the government's initiatives in that area. The Premier has spoken today about two things: additional wages for tens of thousands of people, and additional services for hundreds of thousands of people. Given the 30 per cent wage gap between the public sector and non-government organisations, it is difficult to see how the 15 per cent allocation for this financial year—welcome though it is—can actually do both those jobs, or even the full extent of the wages job. What programs will the Premier put in place to monitor what actually happens with wages or new services?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I will ask Ms Brown to comment on that, but before she does, I will say that the initial payment will give us greater stability and, in the longer term, quality of employees, in respect of skills, in the sector. I will give the Leader of the Opposition a couple of real examples. In the lead-up to the budget I visited a number of organisations and spoke to representatives from one organisation dealing with cerebral palsy. There are thousands of people in the state with that condition, and this organisation cares for them, but often people have multiple disabilities, requiring different therapies and different services. Those representatives said to me that this would allow them to employ other professional medical staff, such as trained physiotherapists, to work within the organisation so that it could provide a wider range of services. That is a very substantial improvement. I also spoke to a young mother there who came along. She said that her everyday life involved trying to make appointments for her daughter to see other services for the assistance she needs because of her range of conditions. Now she will be able to essentially work through one organisation. It means a very tangible improvement for the organisation and, in this case, a mother and her daughter.

In the second example, I met the mother of a young boy who had some serious health issues. She said that her worst nightmare was for the phone to ring and the boy's carer to say that he could not make it because he had an exam or something else. She said that that was traumatic for her son and completely destroyed any other plans she or the other members of her family might have made. She said that this would give her and the rest of her family their lives back. I think it is a very tangible benefit for people receiving assistance. I will now ask Ms Brown to comment.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: My point is: how can the same pot of money do both jobs?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I have just explained a tangible example of how it does.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: It does not do both jobs; it does the services job in those examples.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition did not listen. It is the mere fact of having the continuity of a carer who can be employed on a decent salary and who therefore will stay in employment and maintain his relationship, in this case, with a little boy who would be traumatised every time there was a change of carer.

Mrs R.A. Brown: I will say just a couple of things. Firstly, the rollout of the price adjustments of 25 per cent over three years is for existing levels of service. The additional funding that was announced during the budget process is on top of the \$600 million. The additional funding for community services, as part of the community services package for additional services, is on top of that 25 per cent adjustment. The 25 per cent adjustment is an adjustment over three years to the price for state-purchased services within existing contracts. In addition to that, the key contracting reforms over the next couple of years are intended to not only reduce the administrative burden on both sectors and the costs of reporting and monitoring the deliverables; they are also intended to roll

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out standard contract templates to gain a much more consistent approach across public sector agencies. This will ensure a consistent implementation of the indexation arrangements. In addition to the \$490 million allocated for the 25 per cent price adjustment, \$96 million has been allocated for indexation as part of the ongoing indexation payments that will now become a standard contract provision. In previous instances, one of the findings of the not-for-profit sector was that the full amount of indexation was not being passed on. That will become a standard provision.

In respect of how we will ensure that these will be overseen or implemented, there are two parts to the answer. Firstly, there is funding for implementation; and, secondly, the partnership forum will continue to have joint oversight of the rollout of these reforms. Both community sector organisations and public sector directors general will be involved in an ongoing monitoring role as they meet quarterly over the next couple of years to oversee these reforms.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I will pursue that. The 25 per cent is to increase the price paid for services, which theoretically should go towards wages. There is indexation, which also relates to the price of services. Did the Premier say that there is an additional element for extra services, or not?

Mrs R.A. Brown: In addition to that, as part of the budget there were announcements of additional funding for disability services and other packages in other areas, such as homelessness and things like that. The additional money for services was highlighted throughout the various ministerial portfolios.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Does the \$600 million include money for additional services, or is that money to be found elsewhere?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The \$600 million is basically a 25 per cent increase under those existing contracts. If one looks through the budget, one will find, in addition to that, significant extra moneys under the Disability Services Commission and other agencies. An example is the crash shelter I referred to that came out of meetings with the heads of churches. The \$604 million is an increase, on average, of 25 per cent across existing service contracts, but in addition there is substantial funding in a range of other portfolio areas. There is more than \$1 billion in funding going into the broader sector, not just disability; it could be suicide prevention. More than \$1 billion is going in from this budget, but we highlighted the \$600 million to existing arrangements.

[3.40 pm]

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I want to follow up on the monitoring issue. My understanding is that is an allocation to Treasury to support and monitor the rollout of additional funding. The Premier may tell me to ask the Treasurer this question. I am interested in how the government intends to monitor the outcomes of this program. Will the government know, for example, whether wait increases have been general across the sector or will the government say, “We don’t know; that’s up to the organisations”? Will the government know to what extent additional services are being funded?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Leader of the Opposition again comes from an assumption that this is a wage rise.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Premier started with that assumption.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, I did not at all. We started with the assumption of helping people in our community who are in need; the government does not interpret it as an industrial exercise in the way that the opposition perhaps does. Treasury, within finance —

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I worry about the working poor.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Okay; this is a policy to help people who are in need in our community. As Ms Brown just said, there will be a unit within the Department of Finance that will be involved very closely with Treasury and very closely with Premier and Cabinet in reforming these contracts and simplifying them. That will be an ongoing exercise. In a general sense, that will be overseen through the partnership forum, which does not have any legal standing; that is, the regular meeting of heads of major government agencies involved in this area and the major providers. They have been successful. They work cooperatively.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: What is the status of those organisations funded on a 12-monthly basis? Many organisations receive a financial-year grant and have to reapply each year. What will happen with their contracting arrangements?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I will ask Mrs Brown to comment on this.

Mrs R.A. Brown: The policy released in partnership with the funding reforms, called the delivering community services in partnership policy, provides clarity to both sectors around the difference between the service agreement and the grant, and in what instances they should be used and how they should be applied. In relation

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to the question about organisations with a 12-month service agreement, we would anticipate that line agencies that have that relationship with service providers will work out how they roll those contracts going forward—whether they are rolled over for 12 months or three years. Those organisations that have a grant-type arrangement are not included in this funding adjustment for the reason that it is not about the purchase of services—though, again, that goes back to the relationship between those line agencies and organisations, the way in which the grant is allocated, and for what purpose.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: One issue that other states have had when contracting out services to non-profit organisations is often the non-profit organisations spring from self-help groups and sometimes struggle to adjust to being long-term service providers; that is, they struggle to develop governance systems, staffing and continuity. In some instances it has created instability in the long-term provision of essential services. Will the second tranche of activities planned by the Premier focus on trying to address some of those governance and institutional issues?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Yes, it will be. We do not wish to be overpowering to these organisations or to in any way take away their creativity or ability to deal with unique situations, whether it be in a particular suburb or town. However, for smaller organisations receiving smaller payments from government, obviously the proportion of administration costs and compliance costs is higher. One of the things we hope will come out of the reform is that there may be some merging of organisations. If they do not merge totally, maybe they merge their accountability processes or engage one of the larger agencies to do it on their behalf. I think that is probably a good model. One of the bigger organisations might look after administration and compliance, or look after smaller specialist organisations that work in a similar area. In many senses, the 15 per cent increase from 1 July, although it is a vast amount of money, was a relatively simple process. That reform and improvement in relations and contracts is the real work. That work is underway now.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: I refer to budget paper No 2, volume 1, the third dot point on page 78 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. What has been the Department of the Premier and Cabinet’s role in response to the December 2010 and January 2011 flooding of the Gascoyne River? What have been the outcomes of that role?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Everyone recalls the extraordinary conditions in the Gascoyne causing extensive flooding throughout the Carnarvon area during December. I visited a day or so after the flood. It was just short of their record flood. I was extraordinarily impressed by the way the community was handling it. There was a fair bit of hysteria around in the media, but I did not see any of that on the ground; people were just going about their business. As a few people remarked to me, “We live in Carnarvon; we get floods fairly regularly.” There was a lot of damage throughout the area, obviously, mainly to private horticultural properties. The department was involved quite extensively providing emergency relief and coordinating that relief. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet has played a pivotal role in all of the natural disasters we have had in this state. There have been a few natural disasters, including the fire in the south east corridor, the earthquake in Kalgoorlie and other situations. I will ask Stephen Home to provide comment. In fact Stephen went up to help coordinate the activities, dealing with the immediate situation, and then, I guess, the long-term planning to avert disaster in the future.

Mr S. Home: The department assumed the role of state recovery coordinator—a role specified within the Western Australian natural disaster recovery and relief arrangements. That role basically is centred on pulling together all government agencies to ensure consistency of approach, immediacy of response and the appropriate provision of services to people in need. Having said that, and consistent with what the Premier said, there was not a lot to be done in terms of immediate recovery because all government agencies and the Shire of Carnarvon readily got to work and did a fantastic job. A continuing role of the department has been sorting out some of the issues between agencies, such as the cash-flow issues the shire experienced because of the magnitude of the work, sorting out some of the arrangements with the commonwealth and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority in terms of the category under which federal assistance will be provided—and so forth.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I understand the department is undertaking strategic reviews of agencies and that these are separate to the value-for-money reviews being undertaken by the Department of Treasury and Finance. What strategic reviews are currently underway, what are the terms of reference or the aims of these strategic reviews, why is the Public Sector Commissioner not undertaking these reviews, and why are some agencies being reviewed by both Treasury and the Premier’s department?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I will ask Mr Home to comment. One thing I am discovering, or rediscovering, is that the overall management of the public sector is a continually moving beast. Governments might have policy objectives, they might have changes in policy, or they react to different circumstances. We have made a number of structural changes within government. We are looking at one or two others. My approach is to proceed

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cautiously and carefully. It is not appropriate to think that a government stands still. We are looking at what happens functionally in various areas, whether there is overlap, duplication or, indeed, whether some roles are being underdone or missed. I will ask Mr Home to comment on the specifics of reviews presently underway.

[3.50 pm]

Mr S. Home: These reviews have various origins. Some have come out of the Economic and Expenditure Reform Committee process. A strategic review of the Department of Environment and Conservation is almost complete. That was generated from the EERC. Assistance was provided to the Department of Water acting director general in relation to the restructure of that department. The department has assumed the role of chair of the steering group that is overseeing the reforms to the Government Employees Superannuation Board. That has been a very sensitive role, involving a number of staff, since about last August. The department has also been involved in a number of the value-for-money audits, which I am sure the member would be aware of. There was one in the Department of Education, and there is one underway at the moment for the police service. There have been a number of other reviews that the Public Sector Commissioner has instigated and on which he has sought assistance, and we have supported those.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: So it would seem that there are three reviewing agencies in the government—Treasury, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, and the Public Sector Commission. Why is it necessary for a strategic review to be conducted of the Department of Environment and Conservation, when a value for money review was completed only in February 2010, and the cost of this review would have been in the range of \$170 000 to \$390 000? I am not sure what this particular review costs but it would have been in that range.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: That is a fair question. The Leader of the Opposition is right, in the sense that each of those bodies is involved in some sort of review within the public sector. But they do that from different perspectives. Obviously, Treasury is looking at the cost or financial efficiency of an agency. The Public Sector Commission is obviously looking at the structure of agencies in terms of personnel and qualifications and reporting and compliance and that side of it in terms of the public sector legislation. The reviews from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet tend to be more strategic; that is, they are driven more by a policy issue, where the government might have a policy position, as we did, for example, to create the Public Sector Commission, or to create a separate Department of Transport, or it might be as simple as government having a doubt about whether a structure is the best one to serve the state. The environment portfolio is an example of that.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: What is wrong with the Department of Environment and Conservation that requires this review, or what government policy position is informing the need for this strategic review, in addition to the value-for-money review of the same department, which was conducted only last year?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am sure the Leader of the Opposition was listening intently, but when I gave the Premier's Statement at the beginning of Parliament, I did say that we were looking at the relationship, or interrelationship, between environment and water, and that is part of this issue, for the simple reason that many of the functions in the water regulatory role are very similar to those in the environmental regulatory role. They have the same sorts of issues, and the same sorts of skills are required of personnel, and they can easily overlap. So we are not about to make radical change in that area, but we are looking carefully at that. We are also looking at the issue of the management of national parks and the broader conservation estate. That is an appropriate thing for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to look at. The government is not coming in with a clear directive or policy position. But we suspect that we could handle that broader area of environment and water in a better way.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Will the Premier commit to release the strategic review of the Department of Environment and Conservation for the information of the public, given the public interest in environment and conservation regulatory issues; and will the Premier also commit to release the Treasury department's value-for-money review of the same department?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I think the Leader of the Opposition should address that second question to the Treasurer. I will not commit to release anything until I have seen it myself. So, ask me the question when I have received the review.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Is the government's general approach to these strategic reviews that they are all confidential, or is the government's general approach that they can be released, or should be released, to the public?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: My approach, for what it is worth, is case by case. I do not want reviews to be watered down. They might deal with, not individual people, but the capacity of different sections of a department. I have some respect for the reputation and standing of public servants. That is my concern. There is no political

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concern. If all these things are automatically made public, we will get a sanitised and watered-down report. I do not want that. I want a full and wholesome report.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I have one final question, if I can test your patience, Mr Chairman. Is the review being conducted in-house, or by external consultants; and, if so, what are those external consultants being paid?

Mr S. Home: It is purely in-house. It is being done jointly between the Departments of the Premier and Cabinet and Treasury and Finance.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I refer to budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 75, the heading “Major Spending Changes”, and the fourth dot point, donations and support to disaster victims. Obviously, it has been a difficult 12 months. What support has been provided by the government to disaster victims locally, interstate and internationally?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Quite considerable support has been provided. I think that Western Australia in the last couple of years has been generous. We cannot deal with all situations, and we cannot compensate all people or make up for all the damage and hardship they may suffer. Also, there is always the vexed question of how we can treat people equitably when some are insured and some are not insured. That was a big issue in the Toodyay fire. For the Gascoyne floods in Carnarvon, a range of relief and assistance packages were made directly available. The cost of that was \$100 000. For the Lake Clifton fires, \$70 000 worth of assistance has been provided. For the bushfires in the Perth hills, the government donated \$1 million to the Lord Mayor’s fund, and it also provided \$231 000 in assistance to people affected by the fire. The state has also been generous for victims outside Western Australia. For the Queensland flood, Western Australia donated \$1 million to the Queensland Premier’s disaster relief fund. For the earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, we donated \$500 000 worth of assistance. For the recent Japanese earthquake and tsunami, the state also donated \$500 000 to the Red Cross appeal. I suggest that it has probably been somewhat unprecedented in our history that Western Australia has donated generously to natural disasters, not only within our borders but outside our borders. I think the first exercise in that regard was that Western Australia made an immediate donation of \$1 million following the catastrophic Victorian bushfires. For the recent royal wedding—this is an interesting observation, which no-one noticed—the commonwealth, and I think all the states, including Western Australia, donated to the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which was one of the causes nominated by Prince William and now Princess Catherine. Western Australia has also donated to the Save the Children Fund for work with children in the African commonwealth states. I think Western Australia is the only government in Australia that has donated outside this state to help some of the most impoverished people on the planet, and I am proud of that.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: They are all very worthy donations, and no-one has any dispute about that. But the line item in the budget for the 2010–11 estimated actual is \$1.17 million. The Premier listed a lot more money than that. I am wondering where that money has come from.

[4.00 pm]

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Some of those would have been in previous years.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Is that the explanation or are they elsewhere in the budget?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I will ask the director general to explain.

Mr P.F. Conran: On occasions we get supplementary funding through the Economic and Expenditure Reform Committee processes. If we have available funds, we use those. If we do not, we seek supplementary funding through the EERC processes.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The next line on that chart, “Increased Policy Capacity”, shows a figure of \$2.264 million for this budget year. Is that related to that same amount or is that something else?

Mr P.F. Conran: That is something else. That is in relation to the rollout of the community sector reforms. We will be working very closely with Treasury and the line agencies but the whole reform process is quite an intensive exercise, and we will need some very skilled people. That will provide us with the capacity to do that as well. In addition, some element of that relates to the Kimberley science and conservation strategy. We will be assisting with that strategy and will be in negotiations with the various groups, including Aboriginal and conservation organisations. That is what those funds are principally for.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: In the past 12 months, how many complaints has the department had to deal with from ministerial offices over some internal issue? More specifically, has Minister Collier’s office requested assistance in resolving issues of bullying between staff in the ministerial office; and, if so, were those matters resolved?

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Mr C.J. BARNETT: I do not know whether the department keeps a record of complaints from ministerial offices. I am not aware of any in the past 12 months but maybe the director general or someone else will be able to assist.

Mr G.J. Moore: I am not aware of any formal complaints. As a department, as have most public sector agencies, we have a grievance process through which any employee of an agency can raise issues with nominated trained grievance officers. That is an informal, confidential process. Although there is a contact register of those meetings, I am not aware that anything has specifically come from a ministerial office. There is a more formal process. That is directed to the director general's delegated officer, who is the manager of human resources, duly appointed. Again, I am not aware of any formal complaints but perhaps we can look at that and get back on a question on notice.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you requesting that supplementary information be provided?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, I am not.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I refer to the dot point at the bottom of page 76, which states —

The department will also continue to provide strategic support for the expansion of the Independent Public Schools initiative ...

I have always been a bit curious about the precise meaning of this policy and how independent the schools are. Could the Premier inform us of the exact nature of this policy? For example, do these schools have the capacity to reduce the number of people employed as gardeners and cleaners and perhaps replace them with teachers or education assistants? Do they have the power, for example, to accept year 7s into high school, even though the education minister is yet to make a formal decision on this matter? Do they have to follow government purchasing policies? Do they have the right to opt out of the national curriculum or amend their implementation of the national curriculum? How independent are independent public schools? Do they, for example, have the capacity to sack a teacher? What is the nature of this independence that is claimed for these schools?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Clearly, this question should be directed to the Minister for Education.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: It is a strategic initiative, which the Premier is assisting with.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It clearly should go to the Minister for Education if the Leader of the Opposition wants a detailed dissertation on independent public schools. I will give a brief answer, but I suggest the question be asked of the minister. In relation to independent public schools, it is not an absolute independence but they do operate essentially on a one-line budget and they do have great flexibility and freedom to make decisions at a school level. They do not have the capacity to make across-the-board policy decisions—for example, on year 7s or the like. Also, they have quite a lot of flexibility in the syllabus within the broad curriculum structure. As time goes on, I expect there to be increasing levels of independence within those schools but maybe not each school will go at the same pace. Some schools may get to higher levels of independence than others. This has been the most significant school-based reform in education for many years. It is the envy of other states and it is the envy of the Prime Minister; she would like to see it in other states but I do not know whether she will get that.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Premier —

The CHAIRMAN: Is the member asking a further question?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: It has been stated that these questions are not pertinent to the Premier at this stage.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I was going to ask how many staff are allocated in the department to the item that —

The CHAIRMAN: I suggest that that is appropriate for the Minister for Education.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It is in the Premier's —

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It comes under the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. I do not know whether there is any particular number of staff. I will ask Mr Conran to comment.

Mr P.F. Conran: There is no particular number of staff. At the moment we have about two people who look at these issues on a regular basis. I am occasionally involved in looking at the issues as well. That is broader in terms of education.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I return to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting on page 78 of the *Budget Statements* under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. The first dot point refers to preparations for CHOGM. I am interested to know whether we are looking at creating opportunities for local Western Australian businesses to participate in CHOGM events later this year.

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Mr C.J. BARNETT: I guess the most obvious involvement for business is in the commonwealth business forum, which will be attended by business leaders not only from within this state and Australia but also from a number of commonwealth nations. I expect there will also be fairly strong participation of community leaders in that forum in one way or another. We have also stepped outside the commonwealth and invited participation from countries that are major trading partners to this state. I do not know how that will pan out in the end but we have issued invitations for some participation from Japan, China and Korea, with India and Singapore being commonwealth nations. I hope we will get some involvement but it is still a few months away. That will be the main opportunity.

In a different sense, any business in the accommodation and hospitality industry will do very well for a few days during CHOGM. The restaurants will be full.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Premier said the workshops would be full and he was wrong.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Just watch this space. All the accommodation is basically booked out. That presents its own logistical problems. I will ask the director of CHOGM to comment. We are going to great lengths to ensure that local businesses, particularly in that area, have a full opportunity to be part of it. I will ask Mr Muirhead to comment on how service supply industries around Western Australia can get involved. I cannot see the member at the moment. I am trying to communicate. A wandering minstrel from down Mandurah way is wandering around the chamber like he is on holiday. I will ask Mr Muirhead to provide a comment to the member now that I can see her.

Mr R. Muirhead: We are estimating a minimum of about \$80 million in additional expenditure to this state, which will be spread across a wide range of industries. One of the largest contracts let by the CHOGM task force out of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet went to Perth Expohire and Furniture Group, which has a major contract for the design, build and fit-out of all CHOGM 2011 venues. That is a huge contract. There will be a range of things through the arts and cultural events. We will see some significant benefit for companies providing goods and services into CHOGM and to the peripheral events, both the official events and the other ones that the Premier already mentioned earlier that the people of Western Australia and the delegates will be able to enjoy.

[4.10 pm]

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I refer to the last dot point on page 76, which states —

The Department will also continue to provide strategic support for ... and assist with the implementation of initiatives to improve ... mental health services ...

Given, firstly, that only one suicide prevention community action plan out of 50 is in place; secondly, that the government has failed to spend the \$13 million on suicide prevention in two years that it promised it would at the election; thirdly, that the chairman of the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention has suddenly resigned and is yet to be replaced; and, fourthly, that the provision of limited resources in the WA Police coronial investigation unit and the Coroner's Court have meant that hundreds of suicide cases that are some 12 months old have not been investigated, does the Premier think that this aspect of his department's work has been a success?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Again, I suggest that the Leader of the Opposition direct that question to the Minister for Mental Health.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Why is that dot point in the budget papers? It should not be in there if the Premier is not prepared to answer the opposition's questions on it.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I will make some comments, but it is not a portfolio for which I have direct responsibility.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: When an area of government service is failing, would the Premier not expect his department to make sure that it does not continue to fail?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am not interested in the Leader of the Opposition's comments.

The CHAIRMAN: The Leader of the Opposition has asked a question. He can listen to the response and then ask further questions.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: In response to the Leader of the Opposition's interjection, obviously the Department of the Premier and Cabinet has an oversight responsibility over every single agency and every policy area of government.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: If a department is failing, why does the Premier not step in?

The CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition!

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Mr C.J. BARNETT: Perhaps we can move on to the next question if the Leader of the Opposition will not listen. Does he want to listen to me or not? Mental health and suicide prevention is important. This is the first government in Western Australia's history to set up a Minister for Mental Health and the first government in Australia to set up a Mental Health Commission, which is still in its early days and will take some time to evolve. Suicide prevention is a priority of this government. As the Minister for Mental Health said the other day, after traffic accidents, suicide is the most common reason for loss of life among people under 30. We are seeing hundreds of people lose their life through suicide. I ask Ms Brown to comment on the role the department is playing in supporting the Minister for Mental Health and the developments within the Mental Health Commission.

Mrs R.A. Brown: We have been working jointly with the Mental Health Commission in overseeing the establishment of the commission. We have an officer on secondment who is assisting in establishing not only the commission's organisational structure, but also other elements. For example, we have a role on the commissioner's reference group to progress a quality framework for mental health services and we provide support and assistance to progress some cross-sector initiatives that the commission is involved in. That includes also the link to the community sector more generally. The commission is working very closely with the peak mental health body, the Western Australian Association for Mental Health. Other reforms that we have been progressing with the community sector have been done in partnership with the Mental Health Commission, given the strong alignment of the government's direction around building capacity over the next few years for community-based initiatives. Our work has been of a joint nature, given the cross-sector reforms that we have been leading and the implications that they will have on the commission and on the delivery of mental health services, particularly through the not-for-profit sector.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 4.14 to 4.24 pm