

Division 36: Communities — Service 1, Youth, \$170 879 000 —

Mr I.C. Blayney, Chair.

Mr D.J. Kelly, Minister for Youth.

Ms M. Andrews, Director General.

Mrs R. Green, Deputy Director General, Community Services.

Ms H. Nys, Executive Director, Service, Design and Support.

Mr M. Richardson, Director, Management, Accounting and Financial Analysis.

Mr N. Wijayadasa, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms N. Arrowsmith, Chief of Staff, Minister for Youth.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, and I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information will be provided. I will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by Friday, 30 October 2020. I caution members that if a minister asks that a question be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge that through the online questions system.

Member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 518 and the line item "Youth Services Initiatives" and the one below it in the table titled "Spending Changes". The figure attributed to that line item is \$259 000, which then disappears under the forward estimates. Does another grant program or initiative replace this?

Mr D.J. KELLY: That \$259 000 for the youth services initiative relates largely to COVID projects that were specific to that financial year. We provided some additional money to the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia, in particular, for the provision of refurbished devices. Because of the shutdown, a lot of youth services ceased to function, so young people who would have ordinarily accessed the youth service face to face were unable to do so. This disadvantaged a percentage of young people. I think every young person has a phone but some young people in the community do not have a device or, if they have a device, they do not have data because of financial circumstances. We ran a project that provided refurbished devices with six months' worth of data. We provided that funding to the Youth Affairs Council of WA. It is currently implementing that. We also gave it some money to develop a live dashboard of youth services so that young people in one spot could see which services were still available to access. That is the bulk of that \$259 000. They were particular one-off COVID payments. The other line item reflects some money that has come through the Mental Health Commission to Perth Inner City Youth Services. Again, that is a one-off payment that has come through the Mental Health Commission for additional accommodation services.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given our concerns for youth during COVID, with mental health being at the top of the list of concerns, in conjunction with the Mental Health Commission, this does not appear to be attracting funding anymore. What is the government planning to support this cohort in times ahead in the pandemic?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I am not sure what the member means about youth mental health not attracting funding. Mental health is the responsibility of the Minister for Mental Health, Roger Cook. It is not my portfolio. If the member has particular questions about that, he should direct them to him. If we look at the suite of things that this government has done to assist youth during this period, again, not specifically related to this portfolio, we have announced changes to TAFE fees, for example. Our reduction in TAFE fees is so rapid, it is almost a bit difficult to keep up with. We announced some changes some months ago and we announced a whole bunch today. As a government, we are very conscious of the impact that COVID-19 has had on young people in particular. But most of those initiatives do not fall within my portfolio.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I was referring to the Mental Health Commission, which I understand has provided funding in the past to this category. Is the government ceasing funding?

Mr D.J. KELLY: There has been no change. In fact, the only funding that I am aware of is that new funding that has been made available through the Mental Health Commission. I am not aware of any reduction in funding.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I refer the minister to the line item “Youth Support Grants” at the bottom of the table on page 538 of budget paper No 2. It would seem that that allocation rose to \$650 000 in the current year. What types of causes is that money invested in and how has it impacted on youth? Given that there is a rather large and growing cohort of youth in the Baldivis electorate, I am really keen to know how youth can benefit from those grants.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I thank the member for the question. I want to give some credit to my predecessor, Peter Tinley, for the work that he did while he had this portfolio. The amount of grants available was quite low—\$105 000. Additional grants were only made available if money was left over at the end of the year—change at the back of the couch—which made those grant programs quite unreliable. We have carried out a review. Within the budget, we determined that there are ongoing commitments at a much higher level that we can make, such as youth engagement grants of up to \$10 000 to implement projects that engage young people, aged 10 to 18, to develop knowledge, skills, leadership opportunities and become more active in community life. Those grants are well sought after. One of the grants that we have recently made, which I am particularly happy with, is a three-year grant agreement that has been reached with the Youth Affairs Council for a new advocacy body for young people within the LGBTIQ+ group. The Ministerial Youth Advisory Council advocated very strongly to me that young people in that cohort still suffer significant discrimination, whether it be in employment, housing or a variety of services. Giving those young people a voice it just the right thing to do to help us as a community to eliminate that residual discrimination that young people in that cohort often feel.

They are two examples. I mentioned earlier that as part of the COVID response, we provided grants to YACWA around the dashboard of youth services. That is another area. We are also providing grants of \$3 000 for Youth Week. Again, lots of organisations apply for those grants. The Youth Partnership Project has been around for a significant period of time, which is in the south-east corridor of the metropolitan area. It receives a significant amount of money. When we put all those grant streams together, it is quite a significant amount. We are making this commitment for the long term rather than youth getting a bit of extra money if there is a bit of money left over in the department, which is how it used to operate under the previous government. Certainly the young people in the member’s electorate of Baldivis can access those grants as well.

[9.00 pm]

Mr W.R. MARMION: I have an easy question, just seeking clarification. I refer to page 538 and the line item above the one just mentioned, “Cadets WA”. Footnote (b) does not explain to me what has happened. I understand there has been no expenditure for Cadets WA for some time—\$869 000 was budgeted in 2019–20 and not again. The footnote states that it has been reclassified as a supplies and services expense. Can the minister explain what that means?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I can absolutely assure the member that we have maintained funding for cadets. The department, in its wisdom, sometimes changes the way it funds these things. I have a footnote here that could explain it all. Mr Richardson will explain the changes in the funding. I think he can tell us the name of every single cadet unit in the state. If members ask him that, they will get the answer.

Mr M. Richardson: The change relates to a way in which the department passes on those funds—previously, they were grants, which is why they were in the grants table—directly to individual Cadets WA instructors. These are what we call the instructor recognition awards payments. A new arrangement is now in place and those payments are made directly to the schools instead. Rather than a grant being made to an individual, there is a memorandum of understanding or service agreement with the school itself. The budget for those instructor recognition payments is unchanged. It flows through across all the forward estimates, but it will not be seen in this table anymore; it is now under “Supplies and services” in the income statement.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Could I ask a follow-on question, please, minister? I am allowed to ask a question.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Just be careful what you ask, because you will get the name of every cadet unit in the state!

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will not ask for the name of each cadet unit, but I am curious to know how a cadet unit that stands alone rather than being under a school is paid?

Mr D.J. KELLY: It depends what sort of cadet unit it is because some are funded through the various services, such as the Army, the Navy or the Air Force. Some are funded through schools. Is there another category? I think Surf Life Saving WA has cadets. A variety of other organisations sponsor cadets other than schools. It all depends. There is always a sponsoring organisation. There is no cadet unit out there still adrift, if you like.

The appropriation was recommended.