

Division 26: Western Australia Police Force, including Road Safety Commission, \$1 752 947 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr P. Papalia, Minister for Police; Road Safety.

Mr C. Blanch, Commissioner of Police.

Mr A. Adams, Deputy Commissioner.

Ms K. Whiteley, Deputy Commissioner.

Ms S. Cardenia, Director, Finance and Business Services.

Mr J. Catanzaro, Director, Media.

Mr F. Pasquale, Executive Director.

Mr A. Warner, Road Safety Commissioner.

Mr P. Zappelli, Principal Policy Adviser.

Mr J. Gangell, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committee will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with those details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: Good evening, everyone. I refer to page 409, financial statements, and the reference to the additional police officer recruits under the 950 police officer program. There is also a reference on page 400 under ongoing initiatives. How many additional officers have been recruited as part of this commitment for 950 additional officers —

Mr R.S. LOVE: We agreed to do road safety first.

Ms L. METTAM: I missed that bit!

Mr P. PAPALIA: If we can—if the member does not mind. It is just Adrian, and then he can go. Is the member okay with that? Sorry about that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I kick off with a question on road safety. Apologies if that was unclear, Libby.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Yes, sorry; we had a chat during the break.

Ms L. METTAM: That is okay.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 402 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the paragraph on regional road safety. I refer also to the statistic that the number of people who died on regional roads increased by 17 per cent in 2022. What is going wrong with the campaigns if we are seeing more deaths on our regional roads? What can we do to raise awareness amongst our road users?

Mr P. PAPALIA: There is not necessarily something going wrong with the campaigns. There was an increase in the road toll last year right around the nation. I can confirm that we are in the process of the biggest spend on regional road safety upgrades. The Leader of the Opposition would be aware of the regional road safety program that is straightening roads, hardening and widening the shoulders and installing audible edging and centre-lines.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is all right; I will ask a question about it.

Mr P. PAPALIA: We are spending \$875.5 million, most of which has been spent. About \$300 million worth of work is currently underway. That pretty much covers off on 40 years of regional road safety improvements in about four years on the major arterial roads. Despite that comment in the budget, I can tell the Leader of the Opposition that the most recent incident analysis by Main Roads Western Australia showed that the rate is going down on those roads on which we have conducted that work. It has shifted significantly. Historically, two-thirds of deaths have been in the regions and one-third have been in the city. Peter Woronzow was at a function with me during

National Road Safety Week last week and he indicated that they have done an analysis of serious crashes on those roads on which we have conducted that work. It is early days, but it looks as though it is having a measurable impact. Minister Saffioti has told me this, too. This figure in the budget is a bit deceptive; that was the figure at the time of writing the budget. It specifically talks about the raw numbers in terms of deaths. That is an accepted fact. There are more people on the roads and more people travelling and the like. That does not make it acceptable or a good thing, but there is an indication that that spend is working and there is a change. As soon as we get better analysis and we are able to, we will make that public so that people know about it.

There are ongoing education campaigns. The things that are killing people now are probably the same as they were 20 years ago—maybe not, because we did not have mobile phones then—or in the last five or 10 years. They include speeding and not wearing seatbelts. It is crazy; 44 people died in Western Australia last year from not wearing seatbelts, and a lot of them were in the regions. They also include inattention, often due to mobile devices or things of that nature; drinking and illicit drug use; and fatigue. Those five things remain the identified causes of the vast majority of deaths or serious crashes on our roads. That is unchanged. There has not been a new phenomenon. However, it is disturbing that the number is getting bigger and we are making all these efforts. Early indications from some recent analysis suggest that the road improvements are working. That is a good thing, because as more of that work is completed, we anticipate that a greater benefit will be realised.

Of course, people die in serious crashes in the city as well and we have to address that. A lot of them are around intersections. The Leader of the Opposition would have seen the recent initiative by the minister to reduce the speed on 80-kilometre-an-hour roads or higher to 70 kilometres an hour as cars approach traffic lights at intersections. That is mostly in the metro area. That is because intersections are where most serious crashes occur in the metropolitan area, and they are trying to tackle that. There are campaigns. I might get the Road Safety Commissioner to talk about what drives their research around what is causing the problem, where we target campaigns and how we try to tackle the problem directly.

[8.10 pm]

Mr A. Warner: The campaign to get people to change their behaviour on the roads is a complex space. We understand much more about the psychology of driver behaviour. The classic public health education and road safety campaigns around the, “Don’t do this and don’t do that”, and the shock-and-awe public health campaigns work up to a point, but after that they do not work at all. The people who are entrenched in their behaviours are very hard to shift with those traditional messages. We have done a lot of market research, and much more in the last couple of years, into driver behaviour and psychology. We know what triggers people to change.

We have done two things. The first is that we have tried to expand our channels to move much more into active, targeted social and digital channels so that people are getting the information that is specific to the instances they need it for. For example, when people are looking up directions on social media apps, we can target certain behaviour to addresses that cohort. In large part, our road toll is a middle-aged men problem and so we are trying to target middle-aged men with certain messages in certain forums.

The second thing that we are trying to do is engage people. One of the key factors in road safety messaging is getting people to understand that it is everybody’s problem. Everyone can make little changes to their driving habits and that will add up and have an impact. When we use our traditional “Don’t drink and drive” campaigns—we still have to do some of that because it works for certain people—it allows people to go into a frame of mind that it is someone else’s problem. The big shift we have to make if we are serious about addressing the road safety culture in Western Australia is to say, “What can I do differently?” That is where we are trying to focus everything from now on.

Mr P. PAPALIA: One other thing we are absolutely going to do in this budget is roll out the purchase of the mobile point-to-point cameras that we trialled. Members will have seen those trials. We will buy three sets of them, which is three pairs. We trialled them in the regions and in the wheatbelt, which has not had much in the way of camera activity. These smart road safety cameras are capable of identifying whether someone is not wearing a seatbelt or is using a mobile phone and they can discern a single vehicle from a vehicle towing a trailer or caravan and the difference between a truck and a car. The older technology does not do that. All those things have been demonstrated. New South Wales and Queensland used different versions of those cameras. Initially, New South Wales had cameras that just identified phones and Queensland had cameras that identified phones and seatbelts. We know from their experience that the cameras have had a massive impact on people’s behaviour. People changed their behaviour and the death rate dropped. In New South Wales, the death rate was more than 200 fewer deaths than in the previous corresponding period over the two years that the cameras were in use. The last time we heard, Queensland saw a 10 per cent drop in the number of people who died over six months in those locations. We hope that we will achieve that. We have to pass the law to enable us to infringe people, but we have all the knowledge now of where the cameras are needed and how we can use them. We hope and anticipate that it will make a big difference, particularly in the regions.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Further to that last point, I was going to ask whether any of the new technology on the freeways—the cameras and the like—are actually being used to infringe people because we already have the averaging cameras on Forrest Highway that are being used to infringe people, are they not?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Those cameras have been there for years, and they are fixed. As the member would probably be aware—this is a good thing—people are aware of them and, knowing that they are there, they will pull over to servo and get a coffee or something. That is not a bad thing because it lowers the likelihood of people suffering from fatigue, but the cameras are fixed and people know exactly where they are. These new cameras will be on trailers and will be mobile. People will not know where the second one will be. They can be moved to another location from one day to the next. We have a lot of good data about people not adhering to the lowest speed limits through roadworks. The Traffic Management Association and other bodies that represent people who work on our roads are really concerned about people speeding through those 40-kilometres-an-hour zones. When we place cameras in those locations, it is clearly because people are not anticipating being caught. The further out they are from the city, the worse it gets, actually. These are some of the things that we can do. These cameras will make a difference. They are much more capable, they will be less predictable and there will be multiples of them. We will have three pairs, so they can be moved around the state.

Ms M. BEARD: I was going to ask where they might be located.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The answer to the question about whether we are infringing people is not yet, because the current legislation is very prescriptive about camera types and does not allow us to use these cameras because they are not one of the prescribed types. We will have to amend the act to enable that. The cameras on the Kwinana and Mitchell Freeways that the member referred to are fixed cameras, but they are not currently used to infringe people for the same reason. It is technology that did not exist when the law was written, so we are going to amend it.

Ms M. BEARD: How are the locations selected? From my time on the road, I know which stretches of road people speed on.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I will ask the commissioner to respond.

Mr A. Warner: There are two processes. One is for the fixed cameras, like the red-light cameras, and the fixed cameras that we have talked about. Their location is based on historical crash risk, including crash data and associated risk. There is a whole science behind it. A lot of engineers and others get involved, from Main Roads Western Australia to the police, and we are leading that charge. We provide input to police, but they control the mobile deployments on a daily basis. They go where the risk is.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I want to ask about the balance of the road trauma trust account. It is probably easier to go to page 276 of budget paper No 3, which has a section on that account. My question is about the unspent balance of the account and the fact that there is obviously a need to act to reduce the road toll. The minister has been speaking about the smart cameras. Perhaps the money could be used on road improvements—I do not know. Is it better to spend the money on the roads than have \$57 million sitting in the bank?

[8.20 pm]

Mr P. PAPALIA: This is an unfortunate consequence of when the budget is printed and compiled. The member needs to remember that the way the road trauma trust account operates is that all the fines revenue is deposited into the account, but that flow is not linear. The balance fluctuates, depending on people's behaviour and how rapidly or otherwise they are penalised and infringed. It is a bit unpredictable and the amount of money changes. The member can see that the balance of the account will vary quite significantly from day to day. When the budget was printed, there was that amount of money in the account, but that is not the amount that will be in the account at the end of the financial year. I will get the commissioner to explain that in a moment. The member is better off looking at the total global amount that came in and went out of the account over the last four years. It is an almost equal amount.

The account does retain funds and then, by prudent financial management, and because of the unpredictable nature of this revenue stream, practices demand that the trust retains a buffer of about \$10 million, and it does that. The trust will never disburse at any time an amount of money that will drop the account balance below \$10 million. Beyond that, it disburses everything that comes in, but it does not go in a predictable fashion because of the nature of the revenue stream, and there will be delays in expenditure and the like. It is not like there is \$57 million sitting in that account. I know of some speculation by particularly interested journalists. There was a time more than a decade ago when \$90 million was sitting there for a considerable time. That does not happen now. Now, all the money that comes in, goes out, and it is managed by the chair of the Road Safety Council, Katie Hodson-Thomas. The council has representatives on it from the RAC, the Western Australian Local Government Association and relevant government agencies that have an interest in road safety, and Katie has worked to ensure that we have very

high level representation from all those bodies that will ensure the most effective use of the funds. The commissioner probably has handy the numbers about what came in and went out over time.

Mr A. Warner: It is fair to say that over successive governments, the road trauma trust account has been managed in a very consistent fashion on the principle that governments always plan to spend as much as they expect to receive. On average from this current government's first budget in 2017–18 up until 30 June this year, and based on what we expect the end result to be, the average annual revenue has been \$106 million and average annual expenditure has been \$103 million. If we look forward in this budget to the end of the forward estimates, it changes a little bit to \$106 million in average revenue and \$107 million in average annual expenditure. That is a total of \$634 million that will have flowed into the road trauma trust account over the current government's period, of which \$615 million will have been spent to the end of this year. That difference largely reflects a completely unanticipated revenue of about \$25 million since the last time we sat here talking about the budget. Of that revenue, \$10 million was adjusted and picked up in the midyear review that relates to 2021–22, and there has been a \$15 million adjustment in this budget for 2022–23. All that extra revenue has been factored into new spending profiles over the forward estimates. That is consistent with the principle of always planning to spend as much as we expect to receive, but understanding there is volatility.

Over the longer term, it lines up. From 2012–13 to the end of this financial year, we will have had \$1.128 million in revenue and \$1.124 million in expenditure, so quite a minimal difference over that 10-year period, and that is the way we do it. We have two points in time at which the Road Safety Council reviews the road trauma trust account and its spending profile, which is the budget process, and the midyear review cycle. Between those two points, the Road Safety Commission monitors things to make sure that we are not getting into a risky situation, as the minister said, with that prudential buffer of \$10 million.

Mr R.S. LOVE: So the Road Safety Council reviews the expenditure of the funds, but it does not actually make the decisions.

Mr P. PAPALIA: It actually does. It recommends or proposes to me a spending profile, and I endorse what it recommends.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I want to go back to the earlier point that we started on around the regional road toll. The expenditures are outlined as a percentage of the trust account. How much is actually dedicated towards addressing that disparity between the regional and metropolitan toll?

Mr P. PAPALIA: As I said earlier, quite outside of money from the road trauma trust account, the government has dedicated \$875.5 million to that. In the current budget, we have allocated a further \$150 million, subject to that amount being matched by the federal government, which we have not yet heard about. Over a billion dollars will be spent by this government on the regional road safety program. That is a massive spend. On average, about \$20 million of the \$100 million in this account is allocated to the regional road safety program. It is pretty small in the scheme of things, but it is significant as far as a component of this account is concerned. At the moment, the road trauma trust account has a lot of money in it. Compared with a billion dollars, it is not a lot, but every bit counts. The road trauma trust account has around \$100 million in it, so \$20 million is a fair component of that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 406 and service 4, "Road Safety Commission". The number of full-time employees has increased from 42 in 2021–22 to 56 in this budget period. Can the minister explain what those extra personnel are doing?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I will get the commissioner to explain this because it relates to the additional restructuring and the transfer of people from other places.

Mr A. Warner: The increase in full-time equivalents in our staffing structure is related to a couple of things. One is projects around the infringement reform program, which is still continuing, and the standing up of a new procurement team and project team for the implementation of the rollout of the new safety cameras that the minister referred to. The rest of the increase pleasingly relates to additional resources we have had allocated to us to increase our education and community engagement efforts. We will be standing up a new team to really reinforce and start to deliver programs into schools and to also increase our community engagement. We are actually borrowing, with the goodwill of the Transport Accident Commission in Victoria, a very successful program aimed at school students around incursions on road safety, which we will roll out in two ways. We will bring children in and we will also have a team that will go out, particularly to the regional areas, because, if we look at the road toll, we see that the regional areas are a dominant factor in our horrible road statistics. An increase in school-based education, programs and resources for teachers and school-based incursions are rolling out around the regional areas predominantly and that leverages off the youth summit that we had last week, which was very successful. Some of those learnings and the leveraging from Victoria are going to be important.

We also have extra money to expand the community engagement side of things. We believe that if we want to address road safety culture, we have to bring the local community along with local solutions for their areas, which will be different for different areas. On top of the roughly \$2 million that we give to WALGA each year to support its local community engagement efforts around road safety, we will be looking to prioritise through our social impact investment program, local community engagement, including through the Town Team Movement, which is pretty active in the regions.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the fund that we were just told is being rolled out throughout the community found on page 276 of budget paper No 3 and called the community education and engagement program, which has an allocation of \$11.5 million?

[8.30 pm]

Mr A. Warner: I do not have budget paper No 3 in front of me, but I can talk generally about that figure. It relates to the four-year profile of the increase for education and the increase for the community engagement side of things. There are a few other things in there, but largely that is what we were just talking about.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 409 and the paragraph that refers to the additional expenses as part of the government's program for an extra 950 police officers. How many additional officers have been recruited as part of this 2020–21 commitment and are they on track to be delivered by 2024?

Mr P. PAPALIA: The number of officers who have been recruited is 750. What was the other question? Are we on track? The target is above attrition. Under that program, 750 have been recruited. There has been attrition at the same time, so it will still demand greater than 200 more. The continued attrition is a bit unpredictable, but the Western Australia Police Force is funded and resourced to meet the objective of growing the force by 950 above attrition. I can tell the member that there are about 200 at the academy right now, 1 600 local applicants are waiting to go to the academy and, the last time I looked, there were over 1 200 applicants from the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Are we on target? There are a couple of elements to that. One of the constraints at the moment is how many squash through the academy, and the Commissioner of Police is looking at other means of increasing that capacity. It has been done in the past. There have been eras when significantly larger numbers have gone through the academy than there are at the moment. The police force is looking at whether it can do that. There is a significant pool of people. That is not the issue. It is not the pool of people; it is whether we can get them through the door and trained and then get them out into the field, noting of course that the Brits are not brand new off the street. The British and Irish officers have a minimum of three years' experience, so they will undertake a shorter transition course when they come; it will be half the length of the normal course. All that is being worked on at the moment. The police force has all the resources and all the people applying. It is just a matter of enabling the capacity to train people.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify, we are talking about the number of additional officers from when the original commitment was made in 2020–21 and that is taking into account the high number of resignations that we have seen.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The number I talked about is the number of recruits under that program. In the 2020–21 financial year, an additional 370 who completed training were recruited. In 2021–22, there were 210; in 2022–23, there were 170; and in the 2023–24 financial year, an additional 200 are planned. Those were the planned target numbers and they have been achieved. The force is recruiting and, as I said, it is looking to expand capacity, because attrition is a bit more difficult to predict. It has varied over time. In the first couple of years, attrition was low and in the last couple of years, it has been higher. At the moment, it is a bit difficult to predict what it will be like over the next 12 months.

Ms L. METTAM: Taking into account the high number of resignations that have been experienced since the program was announced, what is the total number of officers now?

Mr P. PAPALIA: If the member is talking about this cohort as opposed to when we took office —

Ms L. METTAM: No —

Mr P. PAPALIA: From when we took office, there are more than 400.

Ms L. METTAM: — since the program was announced in 2020–21.

Mr P. PAPALIA: We are about 140 in front of the number, bearing in mind that we have more police from the few years before this commitment, when we grew the police force. There are more than 400 additional police officers from, say, 2016.

Ms L. METTAM: But since that commitment was made for 950 officers, we are up 140 officers.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Or thereabouts. There are 200 at the academy, and more will come in. It changes; as they graduate from a course, it changes.

Ms L. METTAM: That is a significant shortfall, is it not, minister?

Mr P. PAPALIA: We are not at the end yet.

Ms L. METTAM: How many officers have been recruited from overseas through the international program?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I told the member earlier that there are more than 1 200 applicants. The assessment process is underway, and part of that process involves the people who are selected getting visas, which is beyond our control. We have a labour agreement with the federal government that enables us to essentially offer them permanent residency almost immediately upon arrival. There is an agreement with the federal government to bring people here. At the moment, under the agreement 150 officers a year will be accommodated, but we can expand that and we will look towards growing that. If we wanted to increase the number, it would be about the number we can get through the academy. As I said, work is being done on enhancing capacity at the academy because it is short on courses. We have not started one yet. We have always said that we hope the first ones will be here around September.

Ms L. METTAM: Of the 1 200 applicants who have expressed an interest, would we take 150 at a time every year?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Not necessarily; 150 annually was the agreement, but we will probably expand that. I do not anticipate that that will be problematic with the federal government, because we are talking about agreements right around the country to grow migrant numbers and the police are part of that. We have already begun the process of applying to Minister Giles to increase that number, but I think we are talking about a normal squad of about 30 at a time. There would be 150 in a year, but we could increase that. The point is that there are more than 120 applicants. We want to get the best ones, but, even so, there are a lot of applicants. There is capacity for us to increase that if we get the agreement with the federal government, which I do not anticipate any great drama with. The issue would be at this end—getting them through the academy more than getting them here.

Ms L. METTAM: Hopefully, in negotiation with the federal government, the force might be able to attain more than these 150 applicants, but would they still need three years of training here?

Mr P. PAPALIA: No.

Ms L. METTAM: They will not need three years of training.

[8.40 pm]

Mr P. PAPALIA: These officers are experienced and have already had three years' minimum service as a police officer to be able to apply. I was making the point of comparison with our local candidates. We have about 1 600 local candidates who have applied, and they are mostly people who have never been police officers before, so they go through a full course at the police academy. They go from being raw recruits to being on probation in the districts and subdistricts. We also get Brits who do half the length of course because they have had a minimum of three years as a police officer in the UK or Ireland. They are already experienced. When they come here, they obviously need specific training in our laws, customs, culture and the like, but it is half the length of training at the academy. They can then go out and be probationary officers, but it is a shorter time frame than for the other recruits. The other guys do a year of probation, and these guys do six months. They are already police officers. All we are doing is changing their uniforms and teaching them Australian slang, appropriate cultural awareness and the like; the use of firearms, tasers and things that they might not have been given by their other police forces in a lot of cases; and all the laws they need to know and that sort of training. It is not like they are raw recruits. In a way, we get an immediate lift from experienced officers joining the force.

Ms L. METTAM: Is it about six months of training?

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is three months for these guys—the Brits and the Irish. It is six months for our Western Australian recruits.

Ms L. METTAM: How many sworn officers are currently in the Western Australia Police Force?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Last time we got a briefing note it was 6 619 FTE. That was at the end of April.

Ms L. METTAM: Have our numbers gone backwards?

Mr P. PAPALIA: No. Some of the commentary in the media is mistaken, although I do not think there is anything malicious about it. For a couple of months, particularly last year, the observation was made that attrition exceeded growth. We have set ourselves the very ambitious target of growing the police force by 15 per cent; that is what 950 officers represents, and it means significant growth. For a few months, we were not exceeding the attrition number, so in those months we went backwards. Before that period, there were two years with low attrition, and we added to the numbers. As the member heard earlier, there are in the order of 140 more officers than when we started. We are always adding to that, and attrition is eroding it; it is just a matter of what gets bigger at the time. As I have indicated, we have a very significant pool of people applying locally and from international sources. Really, right

now, it is a matter of WA police adapting its training capacity to be able to punch people through the system and get them out and into the force at a greater number than we might experience attrition.

We are doing everything we can to try to prevent people from leaving. It is not like we are just saying that that will continue and is acceptable. We are in an environment that is very challenging because we have the best economy on the planet. There are a lot of opportunities. Also, concurrently, a lot of people are approaching that period in their service when they have done 10 years. They might have started as a single person and now have a family, and shiftwork is not as attractive as it might have been in the past. It might be the time that suits people to leave.

The command team here is also putting a huge amount of effort into ensuring that we make work more attractive by dealing with some of the pressures that people confront. Deputy Commissioner Whiteley is leading the retention and flexible workplace program. It is one particular element of what WA police is doing to try to make things better.

Before I get Deputy Commissioner Whiteley to explain that, there has been commentary about mental health having an impact and the culture being bad. Claims have been made about what is driving people to leave, based on things like people seeking treatment and assistance. I have said this many times, and I will continue to reinforce this message: that narrative is not right; it does not reflect the modern understanding of mental health and how we should encourage people to seek assistance if they feel they require it. It stigmatises people seeking assistance. We have massively increased the services and support to police officers in this field. People accessing and availing themselves of those services is a good thing. I will pass over to Deputy Commissioner Whiteley in a moment to talk about the workplace measures that are being developed and offered to people. That is not what is driving people to leave.

For the first time ever, we are recognising PTSD as an injury that might have been workplace induced. I am regularly signing off on medical retirements as a consequence of that injury, but there are physical injuries, too. That is just something that has happened. For the first time we are actually helping people, assisting them and recognising that as an injury, but the numbers of officers who are confronting that sort of challenge have not been massively increasing. I will pass over to the deputy commissioner.

Ms K. Whiteley: I can just add a little bit further. Of course, the most important part of our agency is our people. Every single day of the week, we are looking at what else we can do to make it a much more attractive agency for our police officers moving forward. We are in one of the most competitive environments we have ever seen, so we have other police forces around the world also trying to actively recruit police officers. At the moment, we are researching all the various parts of the workforce and making the changes that we need to make so that we become the differential in police officers wanting to come to work in Western Australia, let alone remain here or come from interstate.

A very simple example is our flexible work options. Traditionally, it has been fairly restrictive and managed on a local basis. Sometimes we would see officers struggling with their family or life commitments, such as elderly parents. We have introduced a regime in which we held a series of workshops and engaged with the workforce to ask what we can do to make that process much more streamlined. How can we be much more agile in how we employ and deploy police officers, and what might be their roles on the front line? How do we do it so that we maintain them in the agency but equally give them opportunities to progress? Importantly, we are about 75 per cent through finalising that program. We are always looking for more opportunities and researching across Australia and the world for how else we can maintain and retain our people.

As part of that, we have also done programs of work such as streamlining our frontline officers' opportunities for training. The sergeant promotion process is now a streamlined process that is much more attractive to officers on the front line. Likewise, streamlining our senior sergeant program is currently underway, so we are providing those career path opportunities and making sure that they are available to officers who either are part-time or need flexible work arrangements. A range of efforts is going on currently in this space to make sure that we become the most competitive and the most progressive agency in attracting police.

Of course, that is also supported by making sure that officers have the very best equipment, data and information to make sure that they can execute their duties as efficiently as they possibly can and that we are making the right changes for community safety.

[8.50 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I note the numbers that the minister provided for sworn officers being 6 619 for April. In June 2021, according to the annual report, there were 6 927 sworn officers. Since then, it appears the number has gone backwards. Further, while we are talking about the efforts to attain and attract officers, last year's resignations were quite significant, about three times above the average, with 473 officers resigning in 2022. I would like the minister to clarify. There is still a massive task ahead.

Mr P. PAPALIA: What that number represented was how well we had done in recruiting additional officers in those first couple of years.

Ms L. METTAM: That is extraordinary.

Mr P. PAPALIA: That is the truth.

Ms L. METTAM: The numbers have gone backwards.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Remember that when the commitment to getting 950 above attrition commenced, we were not suffering the attrition rate that subsequently happened after the date the member has talked about.

Ms L. METTAM: I do not call going backwards like that a success!

Mr P. PAPALIA: There has been some pretty simplistic reporting by some journalists who have not really thought about it very much. If we are on a trajectory towards achieving 950 above attrition, but at a certain point on the pathway to 6 900 we suffer attrition beyond anything that has been seen before because we have the best economy in the world and there are greater opportunities for people, and we drop back from that trajectory, then we have not gone back from where we were. There are more than 400 officers above the number when the member was in government. The police force is 400 officers stronger than when members opposite were in government. That is the point to make. The member is saying that at this moment in time, attrition is high. It is because we are constrained by the capacity of the academy due to the way it is operating at the moment, so our graduation of officers means that we are behind that particular curve. We have 200 officers at the academy and there are 1 600 local Western Australian applicants—more than ever before—waiting right now. There are 1 200 overseas applicants, all of whom are officers with three years' experience. It is not about whether right now we are above what we were in June 2021; it is about whether we are above the number when the member was in office, and we are, by 400. Will we be above that even further by the end of the year? I have no doubt.

I have no doubt that we will continue to grow the police force. The police force is resourced to recruit. A huge number of people are wanting to be police officers in Western Australia. Any inappropriate claims made by people about the health and professionalism of our officers are completely unhelpful and wrong. People should not do it because it implies that there is something bad about being a police officer, and there is something wrong about being a police officer in Western Australia, when in fact we have one of the best police forces in the world and our officers are respected by Western Australians like never before. It has been an incredible thing.

Ms L. METTAM: They are leaving like never before, minister.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The only people who apparently do not feel that Western Australian police officers are worthy of respect have been some of the people engaged in commentary about their health.

Ms L. METTAM: Three times above average are leaving. They are leaving in droves.

Mr P. PAPALIA: As I said, if the member knew anything about serving in uniform, she would understand that the worst thing people could do is suggest that they should not seek mental health assistance and not talk about the issues they might be confronting.

Ms L. METTAM: No-one is suggesting that.

Mr P. PAPALIA: That is the worst possible thing that anyone can do. The member may not have done that, but people on her side of politics have done it.

Ms L. METTAM: I have not heard anyone suggest that.

The CHAIR: Member for Thornlie.

Ms L. METTAM: Further question.

The CHAIR: No, it is not your question, member for Vasse.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: My question relates to community perceptions on page 401—just the matter that the minister was touching on—and the incredible strength, support and positive view that the community has towards the WA Police Force. To what extent is that built on the work of the community engagement teams and the role those teams play in building that very strong community view towards our police?

Mr P. PAPALIA: The member, like me, is very familiar with the work of our community engagement teams and the capacity that they have demonstrated quite often in some very challenging circumstances and environments to engage with a diverse range of community groups and individuals. They often de-escalate situations that might have become far more acute had they not been engaged. I can recollect on a number of occasions in recent times when culturally and linguistically diverse communities might have, for instance, been involved in a tragic incident of one type or another, and the community engagement team has provided great service in ensuring that things did not become more aggravated than they otherwise might have. They do that and also regularly assist with building relationships with communities across the state. As a result, one of the benefits of the recruiting numbers the member asked about has been the transformation or shift in composition of our recruit courses. Not long ago one would go

to a graduation and the vast majority of police officers would be Australian born and very likely of Anglo-Saxon ancestry or profile. Now, one would see at just about every graduation many overseas-born people and also a quarter to one-third of graduates will be from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Many speak other languages and bring cultural awareness and a really deep knowledge of cultural environments and language that would not otherwise reside within the Western Australia Police Force. We can see how that will benefit us over time with solving crimes and particularly more sophisticated threats from overseas. They become a really valuable asset. A lot of that can be attributed to the community engagement teams. They get out there and they are the police whom people see. People see that the police are good people. They see it as a potential career path as opposed to what might have been the case in the past. That is a positive thing and they make a huge contribution.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I thank the members of the police here. I refer to page 605. Under the regional and remote policing services area, paragraph 2 is about general policing services provided by districts within regional Western Australia. Can the minister advise us of the rules around police tenure in regional areas? Are there different arrangements in different regions? Have there been any recent changes to any of the tenure arrangements?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Yes, there are different arrangements depending upon location. Some places have tenure and some do not, because of the nature of the location and they are more flexible in attracting people. Work is being done on tenure right now.

[9.00 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: Have there been any recent changes to tenure arrangements for serving police?

Mr P. PAPALIA: No, not yet.

Mr R.S. LOVE: There has been none?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Does the member know where tenure came from? The royal commission into police in Western Australia identified that people who remained in the same location for significant or, in some cases, indefinite periods enabled corrupt behaviour. Tenure was one of the ways to respond to that. Beyond that, tenure facilitates progress and the spread of experience across the force so that people do not become isolated in the sole pursuit of one field of endeavour. Officers will often say—it is a reasonable observation—that the counter to that argument is that tenure tends to be four years. In some cases, specialist skill sets might just be coming to their peak when the person has to go. Therefore, there are pros and cons. In the past, we did not have things like body-worn cameras and almost constant oversight by external authorities, senior officers and bodies such as the Corruption and Crime Commission and the like. It is worth talking about, but at the moment there has not been any change.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 400, budget paper No 2, volume 2, and ongoing initiatives, under spending changes. I want to ask about two line items. The first line item is “Operation Regional Shield (Royalties for Regions)” with \$11.7 million. What locations does that program apply to? I understand that Operation Regional Shield has been very successful, but I cannot see anything for the year ahead.

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is funded for this year. Operation Regional Shield is a response to an acute demand in any location in the regions, as required. The Commissioner of Police can use that funding to apply resources. That may not be officers; it might be capabilities such as intelligence or analysts. All manner of additional capabilities might be deployed—it is whatever is required wherever it is required. Operation Regional Shield is in response to juvenile offending in the regions, but it may be anywhere. The reason that it is not in the forward estimates is that it is a bit responsive to the challenge that is evident at the time. Therefore, at the moment, it is required. The member will be familiar with some parts of WA, particularly in the Kimberley and the Pilbara, and even in the midwest but not so much, where Operation Regional Shield has been deployed. Operation Regional Shield capability has been deployed to Carnarvon, but not recently. The line item means that right now it is funded, and it will be funded again if it is needed. The 950-plus police from the officer infrastructure program will have to go somewhere when they come. As we get the police numbers and the housing capability grows over time and we can put people out in the regions, perhaps that might end up obviating the need for Operation Regional Shield. But, at the moment, it is funded. If the commissioner ever came to us and said that he needed more resources for Operation Regional Shield, he would get it.

Ms M. BEARD: The other line item under ongoing initiatives is “Police and Community Youth Centres (Kununurra)”. Is the Western Australia Police Force looking at the establishment of PCYCs or service delivery in my electorate, which includes Mt Magnet, Meekatharra and even Exmouth? If not a PCYC, is there some kind of structure for youth engagement strategies that the government is looking at to help the police?

Mr P. PAPALIA: The P in PCYC is police!

Ms M. BEARD: Yes, I know!

Mr P. PAPALIA: But it is not a police activity. It is in the police budget as a mechanism for delivering the funding. The member will be familiar with the type of services it provides, and they differ in different locations. We inherited a lot of infrastructure, so there are a lot of PCYC assets around the state that were really in dire need of additional capital when we took office. A lot of money has been delivered to PCYC to restore, renovate, improve and build new ones, like the member has, but the actual activity is really like a non-government organisation. It is a not-for-profit and it is not really part of the police force. It is in the budget because it has to be somewhere and historically there was that association.

With regard to all those other towns, more communities will likely have services being delivered through service providers, and PCYC may be one of those service providers, but at the moment, the police do not actually run the PCYC. They collaborate with them. They support them. They assist. The budget manages the things like capital. Mr Pasquale has inherited some projects for which he will be given the money to upgrade PCYC assets, and that will be done. All the day-to-day activity and where PCYC goes and how it might provide services in smaller towns is really for PCYC as an organisation to decide, not us.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the line item “Firearms Reform” on page 401 at paragraph 10. With the chair’s indulgence, I commend the great work of the WA Police Force in response to the shooting today at Atlantis Beach Baptist College. I think the whole community would agree that it was great work being so quick on the scene and supporting that school community, which must be in significant shock. I know I am and most people would be to see such an event happen here in Perth. My question relates to the firearms legislative reform and the government’s agenda in this space. Would any of the reforms announced so far have had an impact on the shooting incident today?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I will reflect on that incident today. That was a bit of American gun culture right here in the Perth suburbs. It is very disturbing. There are too many licensed firearms in Western Australia. There are 360 000 or so licensed firearms in Western Australia. That is too many. They are too easily accessed. We are going to do something about that with the reform of the Firearms Act. The act is being completely rewritten from the bottom up in accordance with recommendations from the 2016 Law Reform Commission report. Elevating public safety above all else will be the principle consideration of the act and will drive the rewrite. That is not the case under the current laws.

The question to ask with respect to today’s incident is: why do the current laws allow it? They did. The current laws allow for the proliferation of licensed firearms. In the last 13 years, there has been a 60 per cent growth in licensed firearms in Western Australia with no justification such as the demand for vermin eradication or for participation in competitive shooting. Around 60 per cent of the firearms are in the city. The vast majority of them are rifles of the type, or similar to, the ones used today. We have to ask: why has that been allowed to happen? Thirteen years ago, the system for acquiring a firearms licence changed. Up to that point, a person had to go into a police station, physically stand in front of a police officer and make an application for a firearms licence. They had to complete the application, including a written test—that is pretty farcical—in front of a police officer. It was very likely that the person would have been known to the police officer, particularly in a lot of suburbs and regional towns. That changed when the system was centralised and essentially moved to online applications. We have seen a 60 per cent increase in the number of firearms in the state. It will change. In rewriting the Firearms Act 1973, we will reduce the number of firearms in the state and make the management of firearms far more rigorous.

[9.10 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I have been busy with estimates, so I have not read all the reports. I understand that in this case the firearm was obtained from the child’s grandfather.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I would say “allegedly”, understanding that it is still subject to an investigation. We do know that the type of firearms used were rifles.

Ms L. METTAM: Will they be captured by the government’s reforms?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Everything will be captured by our reforms. We are rewriting the entire act. The current law does not elevate public safety as the number one consideration and we will make that the case. By way of example, currently a person who is not deemed by the Commissioner of Police to be a fit and proper person can have their firearm removed. The commissioner may deem that a person who has been convicted of a violent act is not a fit and proper person and their firearm can be removed. This happens. People of that nature can challenge that determination in the State Administrative Tribunal and win because they may not have used the firearm for which they have a licence in committing the act of which they were convicted. They might be a violent criminal who has done something violent and hurt someone—even committed armed robbery—but because they did not use that particular firearm, the act allows them to challenge that decision and get their firearm back. That will not happen after we change the law.

The CHAIR: Thank you, minister. The minister has just outlined the legislative reform for firearms. I do not think we should have any further discussion about the particular incident that occurred today.

Mr P. PAPALIA: If the member wants to talk about the law, that is okay. The chair does not want us to talk about the incident, which is understandable.

Ms L. METTAM: I am talking about reforms.

The CHAIR: No; some of your questions that you did not quite get out then were actually about the incident. There will be no more questions about the incident. If you want to talk about gun reform, that is separate.

Ms L. METTAM: Can I ask one further question on gun reform?

The CHAIR: As long as it has nothing to do with the incident today.

Ms L. METTAM: In terms of reform, understanding that a lot of people with gun licences do the right thing, will the government also look at areas such as online applications—excuse my ignorance here—and the storage of firearms or are those things already captured?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Both those things will be addressed in the rewrite of the act and implementing changes to the firearms management system—essentially, everything will be addressed. The act is 50 years old. We are the only jurisdiction in the country that has not completely rewritten its Firearms Act since the Port Arthur massacre and, because of that, we are vulnerable to being accused of not having done enough to protect the community. We need to change the act to elevate public safety to the number one consideration in the law and we will do that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 403 and the service “Specialist Policing Services”. I note that last year considerably more money, \$663 million, was expended on specialist policing services as opposed to the proposed \$619 million this year. Can the minister tell me why there is a drop in expenditure for that service?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I might ask Mr Pasquale to respond to that.

Mr F. Pasquale: A couple of years ago, we were confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic and with the introduction of COVID, a significant effort and resource capability was established as part of the specialist policing service group. With COVID no longer with us to the extent that we endured it two years ago, the reduction represents that capability being redirected from that service to the metropolitan policing service.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is it a reallocation rather than a reduction in capacity?

Mr F. Pasquale: Correct. The capability for that COVID team was temporarily established in the specialist service area from resourcing within the organisation. Once the pandemic calmed and we went back to business as usual, the capability and resources were redirected back to their origins.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 408, new works and the police station upgrade program 2024–2028. Can the minister provide some information about the stations that might benefit from the upgrades or advise whether they are published in the budget papers?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Mr Pasquale might be the best person to answer this one.

Mr F. Pasquale: As the program demonstrates the cash profile, it starts from 2024–25 onwards. This is an annual program in which we do an assessment of our assets and police stations and one year prior, we make a determination about what that program will look like and establish a program of works for the new year. We are a couple of years out. If the member looks at the works in progress on page 408, she will see the same program. The second item is the police station upgrade program 2022–2024. That is the current program about which I can be more specific. In 2022–23, two police facility upgrade projects are in progress, which are the Kununurra and Midland operational support facilities. They are both scheduled for completion this financial year. A number of other projects are underway and planned for the new year, but I do not have those details.

[9.20 pm]

Ms M. BEARD: Is there some kind of criteria? I know that there are a couple of really old police stations in my electorate and the police often say to me that it would be wonderful to get an upgrade at some point. Is the focus on technology first and then the building? Is there any kind of process that it goes through?

Mr P. PAPALIA: These guys look at their assets and have a prioritised spend on upgrades and refurbishments. During the post-COVID era, when we did the stimulus package, a significant amount of money was spent on the refurbishment of police stations around the state, including in Mingenew, Mullewa and Morawa.

Ms M. BEARD: It is Onslow that I am querying.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Are those not in the member’s electorate?

Mr R.S. LOVE: They are in mine.

Mr P. PAPALIA: They are just outside; they are in the member for Moore's electorate. Every one of those stations got one. The Kalbarri station will get one as a consequence of the cyclone in Kalbarri. It had a tree land in it. That station will be refurbished.

Ms M. BEARD: The Onslow one is fairly old.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am not sure. The police look at their prioritisation and do things as necessary. I travel around and they are regularly doing police stations out of sequence in terms of those that might be older or absolutely need a complete rebuild. They will be doing refurbishments and upgrades. They will fix things that are deteriorating. I will ask Mr Pasquale to add to that.

Mr F. Pasquale: As the minister said, we conduct building condition assessment reports for each of our stations. Obviously, based on the condition assessment reports and the funds that we have available, we look at some kind of prioritisation of the most urgent works for the areas in most demand. Whilst we would like to do more, we have to work within the financial allocation we have available. Having said that, the environment is quite competitive now in terms of being able to get tradespeople and those kinds of professional trades to produce the work. It is all based on those building condition assessments, which are prioritised based on where the greatest demand is. That is all done through a consultation process with operational personnel. We then obviously allocate funds to the highest priority areas and develop a program of works on an annual basis. That is an ongoing annual process. We are quite fortunate because many agencies do not have the good fortune of having annual programs. I talked about the future program that the member referred to earlier. We are quite fortunate. We have a police station program and a custodial program. They are annual programs. We are able to do that prioritisation exercise for those two programs on an annual basis, and that allows us to have that kind of steady investment every year.

Ms M. BEARD: I have a question in relation to parts of the north—I will use Onslow again as the example—in which some mining companies are building significant infrastructure and significant work bases. Does the department work in conjunction with those growth rates and what the resident police might need in that instance?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I will ask the commissioner to respond about what the police do globally with demand.

Mr C. Blanch: We recently did an assessment of growth across the regions, so we do exactly that. Particularly with the 950 program and the expected growth of police, we prioritise regional WA for growth across all districts to see where we need more people. Things like new mining operations are something that we have focused on. Obviously, we subject that to the availability of Government Regional Officers' Housing, but we are targeting significant numbers out of that 950 program to the north of the state.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 403 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the service summary, which notes specialist policing services, and to the government goal of "Safe, Strong and Fair Communities: Supporting our local and regional communities to thrive". The Attorney General made some comments earlier today. I asked the Attorney General about how prosecutors had dropped the state's biggest case of public sector fraud. I asked the Attorney General, during the Corruption and Crime Commission division, how this happened. The Attorney General responded by pointing me to ask some questions of the Minister for Police. He talked about the transient nature of police. The issue in managing this very important case was in some respects due to the transient nature of police and them being able to put together admissible evidence. I just wonder whether the minister is able to comment on that matter. I am talking about the matter of Jacob Anthonisz. It was well publicised; prosecutors dropped over 500 charges because the evidence that was prepared was apparently inadmissible.

The CHAIR: Minister, that is not a relevant budget question.

Mr P. PAPALIA: There are a couple of different reasons I would not answer that. Firstly, prosecutions come under the Attorney General; that is a different division. Secondly, it is inappropriate. The case the member is referring to is still active and subject to going before the courts, so I am not going to talk about it.

The CHAIR: Just for your clarity, member, under standing order 91, "Sub judice convention", I will not allow any further questions on that.

Ms L. METTAM: Can I ask a broader question?

The CHAIR: It depends what it is.

Ms L. METTAM: I will give it a go. We referred to the number of police leaving the force, and I appreciate the significant challenge that the government is trying to grapple with at the moment. Is there a particular challenge in being able to prepare evidence for cases for prosecution? Is it having any other impacts in relation to that?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I will say something and then I will ask the commissioner to respond. I reiterate: there are around 400 more officers in the Western Australia Police Force today than there were when the member was in office.

Ms L. METTAM: But fewer than in 2021.

Mr P. PAPALIA: We grew it and then it dropped a little bit. The massive growth of the police force under this government means that there are 400 more police officers than when the member was in office.

Ms L. METTAM: That is fewer than 100 a year.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The member has to get that. In 2016, when the member was in government, there were 400 fewer officers or thereabouts. We are growing that number all the time. We have committed to growing it by 15 per cent. It is a big target; it is a high bar. We do not set a low bar; we set ourselves a high target. We have funded police to achieve the biggest growth in the police force in the shortest time frame in the history of the state—15 per cent and 950 additional officers above attrition. As I have indicated to the member, hordes of people are seeking to join the WA Police Force despite her best efforts or the best efforts of the opposition's representative, who seems determined to suggest that it is not a good career path. Putting that aside, the member should not be talking about the matter that she is referring to.

Ms L. METTAM: The Attorney —

Mr P. PAPALIA: I do not know what the Attorney General said; I was not there. Whatever the Attorney General said, he was talking about his division, which is not what we are talking about now. If the member is talking about resourcing and whether the police have adequate resources for prosecutions, I will let the commissioner respond.

[9.30 pm]

Mr C. Blanch: Evidential requirements for police have increased significantly over the years, more recently due to the introduction of body-worn video, so our disclosure obligations to court are very significant. We have invested public sector staff—so, not sworn officers—as disclosure officers and other support officers for the compilation of briefs. We have increased those areas to assist officers get their briefs of evidence to court. The video volume is still a challenge for us, and that will only increase. We are working on better techniques within the prosecution area to get body-worn video to defence counsel and the prosecution as quickly as possible in the format they require. Unfortunately, some courts still require different formats or they require it in different ways or they require a hard drive, so we are looking at more streamlined and automated ways of doing that. We are working with the Department of Justice and the courts to come up with a coordinated effort to do that. There are a lot of different strategies afoot to improve the way we can get the large amount of evidence required to the court. Deputy Commissioner Whitely is undertaking a program within the prosecutions division to have early conversations with defence counsel and the Director of Public Prosecutions to get those early resolutions, because I think that is another way we can achieve a more streamlined effort within the court system.

Ms L. METTAM: I should point out that the commentary from the Attorney General was about the transient nature, perhaps, in the prosecution unit. We know that the number of resignations in 2022 was three times the average. Is that also a challenge —

The CHAIR: Member for Vasse, this is about the sixth time you have asked the same question in a different way. We have a standing order regarding repetition or irrelevant debate. Standing order 97 still applies. The member is running out of time. She has the Minister for Police and the highest ranking officers within the police force here. I would suggest the member use her time better and move on to another topic.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay, I will move on. I refer to this statement on page 401 —

The Western Australia Police Force is committed to fostering a culture where its officers and staff are supported, capable and passionate about policing ...

I also refer to an article of 13 May in which *The West Australian* reported —

The CHAIR: Member for Vasse, you need to stick with the budget papers. If you have a question, ask the question. We do not need a preamble or any reference to the paper in your question.

Ms L. METTAM: This is about the workforce culture. Can the minister update us on the internal investigations following the allegations of a kill list being compiled by a commanding officer?

Mr P. PAPALIA: No, because that is something I would not be, and am not, involved in at all. With respect to this particular point, the member is talking about a pretty silly low-level incident that is embarrassing for those involved, but it is not reflective of the general culture in the Western Australia Police Force and is not relevant to this point. It is obviously something that the minister has nothing to do with, because the member is talking about day-to-day operational matters inside Police. If the member wants the commissioner to respond to that specific incident, which he already did publicly, the member can ask him whether he wants to respond. I think it is pretty tacky. It is not an indication of anything endemic and it is not a reflection of the culture. It is an incident that occurred that is embarrassing and wrong and has been, and is being, dealt with in an administrative way by the police, as is appropriate. I actually do not think we should really pursue it any more.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the third significant issue impacting the agency on page 400 that refers to officer safety. We have talked about attitudes towards the police in the community. Can the minister give me an idea of how safe the police actually are? How many police officers were assaulted in the financial year 2022–23, and how did that compare with years past? Is there a trend of increasing violence towards police; and, if so, what is the level of that violence?

Mr P. PAPALIA: The member asked whether there is a trend towards more violence towards police officers. Obviously, numerically there are more police officers. I can tell the member that we increased the number of police officers in the Perth district, mostly in Northbridge, by 175 above the number that were there three years ago. That is the one site in Western Australia where there are most of these types of incidents because, partly, although not entirely, it is the most densely populated entertainment precinct in the state with a lot of police officers and they are there on a Friday and Saturday night. Members can wander down the street and bump into them. It is difficult getting past them on the footpath! By natural logic, that will result in them being at the incidents faster. I know that Deputy Commissioner Adams regularly refers to the fact that we are responding quickly to incidents.

The likelihood of a police officer engaging with someone at the start of an incident as it escalates is high and there is likely to be a greater rate of officers being subject to an assault. Does that mean it is reflective of a general increase? I note that, post-pandemic, right around Australia and just about every advanced jurisdiction in the world, there has been an escalation of incidents of people with mental health committing violence—family and non-family violence. That is a phenomenon that seems to have occurred everywhere. That may be a contributing factor. I do not know and I do not think that the commissioner knows either. We do not have that information with us. That is probably a bit hard to answer as a supplementary question because the member is talking about an entire year.

What did the member ask? Did he ask how it compares with past —

Mr R.S. LOVE: I asked whether police are facing more violence.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The member asked about the numbers.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The numbers are an indication, are they not? If the minister does not have a number, he cannot really say.

Mr P. PAPALIA: That is what I told the member. I explained to him that it is a complex matter and is not necessarily an indication of what the member is specifically suggesting. If the member wants the number of police assaulted this year, I could get that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: And how that compares. Is it a rising trend?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Compared with when?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Compared with five years ago.

Mr P. PAPALIA: If the member wants that information, I would ask that he put the question on notice. If he wants the figures for this year, I think we could get that by way of supplementary information. But if the member wants to go back in history and find a number that I do not know now and I have no idea whether the police know, that would be difficult.

Mr R.S. LOVE: We will start with supplementary information and work backwards.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I undertake to provide the member with the total number of assault public officer—police—offences in the financial year to date. What period does the member want?

Mr R.S. LOVE: In this year, although it is not quite finished.

Mr P. PAPALIA: For the financial year to date?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, for the financial year, and the level of violence.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The member will find that if people are charged with assault public officer, that is an assault on a police officer, but that varies. What meets the criteria can be a number of things. It could be spitting.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, I am aware of that. That is what I was trying to ascertain.

[9.40 pm]

Mr P. PAPALIA: The number may not necessarily reflect what the member is talking about.

Mr R.S. LOVE: We will have the number anyway and start from there.

The CHAIR: For clarity, minister, can you repeat what you will provide?

Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love; Mr Paul Papalia; Ms Merome Beard; Chair; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Terry Healy; Dr David Honey

Mr P. PAPALIA: I undertake to provide the member with the number of police officers who were subject to an assault that resulted in the charge of assault public officer—can you guys help me here? I am struggling.

Mr A. Adams: Yes—assault police officer.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I just want to know the number of police who were assaulted.

Mr P. PAPALIA: That will be the number that the member wants. I will provide the number of police officers in the financial year to date who were on duty and subject to an assault that resulted in a charge of assault police officer.

[*Supplementary Information No A5.*]

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the table of outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 404, specifically the percentage of sworn officer hours available for frontline policing duties, which is a bit less than 70 per cent. This key performance indicator shows that one-third of a sworn officer's time is spent doing tasks other than frontline policing. Can the minister explain why this has occurred?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I might ask the commissioner to answer that.

Mr C. Blanch: The Western Australia Police Force has spent a lot of time on this particular KPI to understand the mathematics that sits behind it. We have worked with the data science and analytics team on it. It is a rolling figure over 12 months that gives frontline availability. It deals with the entire preceding 12 months. When we had officers working on COVID duties in particular, that was considered to be a non-frontline duty. When we had a high number of police on sick leave with COVID, as did all agencies with their staff at the time, that reduced that number significantly. An increase in the number of recruits in our police academy will reduce that number significantly. In those examples, because the police are not doing what is considered to be frontline policing duties—whether they are on sick leave, extended leave or in the academy—that number comes down somewhat. It is not necessarily reflective of other duties. When a large number of police officers are on sick leave and/or a large number of recruits are in the academy, as there were during the COVID pandemic, that number comes down. We expect that, following on from the COVID period, that 12-month lag will start to increase from June this year.

Ms L. METTAM: Thanks for that clarification. I imagine that the Minister for Police, the Commissioner of Police and others would still want to see improvements in the time our police spend on the front line. I accept the commissioner's explanation; I am not questioning that, but in terms of best utilising our officers for frontline policing, what is the government and Western Australian police doing in that regard?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I will ask the commissioner to answer.

Mr C. Blanch: One of the greatest changes to policing in Western Australia since 2019 has been the introduction of mobile devices. Mobile devices during the COVID pandemic were extremely useful for frontline police to stay out on the road. Now that we are through COVID, we are advancing the capability of using those mobile devices in particular to do e-infringements, information reports and intelligence reports on the phone itself. This alleviates the need for a police officer to go back into the police station, thus reducing their frontline presence. When I became commissioner, I set up what I call the policing fundamentals, one of which is high-visibility policing. All our technology investment today is based on keeping the frontline officer out on the road for the maximum time possible. We are finding efficiencies in the way that they do their business so that when a person is trained to be a police officer, they spend most of their career being that police officer rather than performing administrative duties. We are using technology to remove that administrative burden.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the table on page 407 and works in progress, specifically the helicopter replacement with an estimated total cost of \$46 million and \$21 million this year. Can the minister give me an update on that program?

Mr P. PAPALIA: They are on track for delivery and hopefully we will soon be able to announce something about the arrival of the first one.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Was any funding from the road trauma trust account used for the police helicopter?

Mr P. PAPALIA: These are Airbus H145 helicopters. The beauty of this is that we are buying two of them at the same time, so we are replacing two different aircraft frames to achieve a huge uplift in safety, commonality, training, maintenance and sustainability—all the things associated with an aircraft. The member can imagine how complex it has been for the air wing in recent years with two completely different makes of aircraft, each of a different age. Police have had to hop out of one and into another at short notice. It has been pretty dangerous actually, not through their own fault. They are operating the craft in every manner possible to ensure safety. Having two aircraft of the same type increases the likelihood of a much better safety outcome to a very high level. Apart from anything else, these are world-class and cutting-edge helicopters that have been budgeted for from within the police budget.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 403 and the service summary, specifically specialist policing services, but this is a very different question from last time. I note a cut to this area of \$44.5 million from the estimated actual of \$66.39 million —

Mr P. PAPALIA: Did the member not already ask this?

Ms L. METTAM: No.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Mr Pasquale answered it.

Ms L. METTAM: Really—about the canines?

Mr P. PAPALIA: The member asked this one.

Mr T.J. HEALY: They are running out of questions.

Ms L. METTAM: No, we are not. I have another question. I refer to page 410 and paragraph (b) at the bottom of the table that states that the number of actual full-time equivalents for 2021–22 is 9 340 and the 2022–23 estimated actual is 9 182. Why did the approved FTE number go backwards?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I think the member is talking budget matters—numbers and lines and things—so I might ask Mr Pasquale to shed some light on that. He will know what it is all about.

[9.50 pm]

Mr F. Pasquale: Can I just ask for clarification on the variance that the member is chasing? Which numbers is she referring to?

The CHAIR: Member for Vasse, Mr Pasquale wants clarity on what you are asking. Can you repeat the question, please?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes; sorry. Footnote (b) states that the number of actual full-time equivalents for 2021–22 was 9 340 and the estimated actual is 9 182.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Which years is the member referring to?

Ms L. METTAM: I am referring to footnote (b) underneath the income statement. The actual for 2021–22 was 9 340.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Yes, it is an estimate.

Ms L. METTAM: For 2022–23, there is the estimated actual. Why are the approved FTEs going backwards?

Mr P. PAPALIA: They are not, because they will go back up again. Budget numbers vary. The number of police officers varies over time. The estimated actual was not what it was, so there was an actual, and then there is a budget target in the future. It is what we were talking about before. At one point in time, we are on this track and we expect to get to that number, but then if attrition is a little higher, it is down from that and then the target is to go up again.

Ms L. METTAM: Was the minister anticipating it to go backwards?

Mr P. PAPALIA: No. The actual was for the 2021–22 financial year and the estimated actual was for the next financial year and then the budget for 2023–24 is the projection for the 2023–24 budget. They are different years.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 407 and the asset investment program. I note that the emergency services radio network will be shared by the police, fire and emergency services and justice services. I note that it does not involve ambulance services. Is that an omission or is it because there is no willingness by St John Ambulance to be involved? Why would a common radio network not be used by all emergency services?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I might ask Mr Pasquale to respond.

Mr F. Pasquale: In the early planning days of the business case for the emergency services radio network, St John Ambulance, through the Department of Health, was certainly involved in the discussion and the dialogue around its involvement and inclusion. To date, however, the investment that the member can see in the budget papers is purely for the early transition, or tranches 1 and 2 of the program, which is about the immediate needs of the Western Australia Police Force and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services because of their ageing radio devices. At this stage, the initial investment is about replacing in excess of 12 000 devices.

We are required to report back to government through the Office of Digital Government, which is looking at doing a strategic review of future radio communications and what that would look like, particularly given the emerging technology around satellites et cetera. That opportunity will be revisited in looking at the business case and then re-engaging with Health and St John on what the future network capability will look like in the next tranches.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 404 and the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators. The 2021–22 actual for the rate of offences against property, excluding family violence-related offences, per 100 000 people was 4 200 or

thereabouts and the 2022–23 actual was 4 400 or thereabouts, but the police force is persisting with a budget target of 6 200. If it is achieving significantly below that already, why would it persist with the higher target and not try to set itself a lower target? I appreciate that it might give a metric that is achieved, but why is it persisting with a higher target?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I might ask the commissioner to respond.

Mr C. Blanch: The target of 6 200 in our key performance indicators is really what we were aiming for pre-COVID. During the COVID pandemic, we saw a drastic reduction in property-based crime. The Western Australia Police Force has worked hard coming out of the pandemic to keep up the pressure on property-based crime, targeting for offender process statistics. We are pretty pleased with our officers' response in managing property-based crime, but we are still assessing that post-COVID bounce back. Other jurisdictions have seen a return to normal numbers for property-based crime. We were monitoring that, but we have found that we have sustained this lower amount of property-based crime. If I talk particularly about burglaries, in the order of 10 000 fewer burglaries against victims in the last two years is a significant amount. The member is right; it is way below the target. We were monitoring it, thinking that it may show a trend like that shown in the rest of the country and go back to that. We will review it, and we are in the process of reviewing our KPIs, as we are required to do. But that is the explanation for where we are today. For us, it is a good news story to not have 10 000 victims of burglary a year.

Dr D.J. HONEY: That is interesting. Outside of the fact that police officers are working hard, is there a particular theory for why it has reduced? It is substantial. It would be great if that could be encoded into DNA somehow. Does the minister think that people got out of the habit of breaking in or does he ascribe it purely to greater vigilance by police officers?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I will get the commissioner to answer, but there has been an increase in the effectiveness of policing, and sanction rates have increased to extraordinary levels. The member will have noticed, and I think anyone who pays cursory attention to it would have noticed, how rapidly many crimes are resolved now in comparison with only a few years ago. There have been a lot of initiatives around the amalgamation of intelligence with operations via the State Operations Command Centre and other initiatives that the police have enacted in recent times. Everyone has access to data and situational awareness like never before and a whole lot of practices have changed things, but I will let the commissioner answer.

Mr C. Blanch: The numbers of offenders across Western Australia do not change by individuals and numbers, but what we consider high-harm offenders—there is quite a small cohort across the state—can have a drastic impact on these statistics if allowed to continue their offending. In some cases, an individual can do 50 burglaries in a week, which can make a massive difference to a district's impact. We have prided ourselves on focusing on technology, using data and intelligence, and having a rapid response. We have set up rapid response teams and the rapid apprehension squad and we have found that we are able to stymie that recidivist action throughout a week and get them at burglary 1 or 2 rather than at burglary 50 or 60. I think that is why we are seeing a reduction in the number of property-based offences.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 400 and the national anti-gangs squad. There has been only a one-off payment of \$1.65 million in this financial year.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I will let the commissioner answer. Quickly, what is the question, because we want to pass the division before the end of the time?

Mr C. Blanch: The national anti-gangs squad is funded by the commonwealth and it commits to it every two or three years. Its current advice to us is that it may not be funding it post this year, and we are waiting to receive that advice from it.

The appropriation was recommended.

The CHAIR: This committee is adjourned until nine o'clock tomorrow morning.

Committee adjourned at 10.00 pm
