

Division 35: Communities — Services 1 to 6, Volunteering, \$1 154 930 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms H.M. Beazley, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Volunteering.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Ms C. Irwin, Assistant Director General.

Mr C. Stewart, Director, Strategic Policy.

Mr W. Millen, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr O. Pincott, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mr J. Stokes, Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees 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 North West Central.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to “Volunteering WA Digital Platform” under the election commitments at the bottom of page 521 of budget paper No 2. Can the parliamentary secretary outline what that platform provides?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The government has committed \$175 000 over 2021–22 to 2024–25 and \$15 000 recurrent funding for Volunteering WA to develop a statewide digital platform to support the coordination of emergency volunteering. Initial funding of \$100 000 was provided in 2021–22. A \$30 000 grant was provided in 2022–23 to fund a business case to cost and explore the net cost benefit of improvements to volunteer databases operated by Volunteering WA. As I mentioned, the government is providing annual funding of \$15 000 per annum from 2023–24 onwards to support a statewide platform for emergency volunteering knowledge. As the peak body for volunteering in Western Australia, VWA’s mission is to lead, advance and celebrate volunteering in WA. Its vision is for every Western Australian to enjoy volunteering experiences that enrich our state. VWA hosts the national technology platforms for volunteer recruitment and management and several events that celebrate and recognise the essential role our volunteers play, including annual WA Volunteer of the Year Awards. Volunteering WA has a proven track record of working collaboratively with partners to enhance the volunteering sector in WA for the benefit of all Western Australians. VWA provides leadership and support to volunteers, involving organisations throughout the state, and it works to connect volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations with corporate bodies and online volunteer programs and training.

Ms M. BEARD: Are some of the costs for the overall management of that platform or are the funds going to an external group for someone else to do that?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The grant goes to Volunteering WA and then it commissions technology providers to carry out the work.

Ms M. BEARD: My next question relates to volunteering grants on the next page, 522. The actual budget is \$189 000 in 2020–21, and it seems to be \$30 000 in this budget and the out years. Can the parliamentary secretary explain the reason behind the cuts?

[5.50 pm]

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I revert to the director general.

Mr M. Rowe: Thank you very much for the question. In fact, that figure of \$189 000 in the previous financial year includes the ongoing \$30 000 contribution each year for the Thank a Volunteer Day grants program. On top of that, it also includes a number of other grant items that were expended in the 2021–22 financial year. That consists of a one-off payment of \$115 000 to Volunteering WA to promote volunteering and \$45 000 to WA Police Force for a screening subsidy. That subsidy reduces the cost for volunteers to undertake the necessary screening so that they

can go about and get their police clearance as required. Volunteers in Western Australia are subsidised through the WA Police Force, and a grant goes to it for that purpose.

Ms M. BEARD: Noting that priority action 1.1 in the *Western Australian volunteering strategy action plan 2023–2026* is to “Provide funding to peak volunteering body to advance volunteering initiatives in WA”, is there other funding somewhere in the budget that will go towards that?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: The short answer is yes, but for more detail, I will divert the question to the director general.

Mr M. Rowe: Not all the funding that is available through the volunteering portfolio was shown in the administered grants and subsidies line items. The total is \$1.408 million, of which quite a significant portion goes to Volunteering WA as the peak volunteering organisation for Western Australia. In 2023–24, the government will provide \$562 000 to the volunteering centre to operate as the peak body for volunteering. Under the sector support, development and advocacy program, the Department of Communities provides a variety of funding to various peak bodies in Western Australia, and obviously Volunteering WA is the peak body for volunteering. A key focus for 2023–24 is to increase volunteer numbers through a collaborative approach with Volunteering WA; that is obviously about building resilience in the sector to ensure that volunteer numbers continue to rise and volunteering services are responsive to changing community needs.

Ms M. BEARD: I note that Volunteering WA calculated the volunteer contribution as being \$39 billion worth of value to WA. Can the parliamentary secretary outline the number of volunteers in Western Australia?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I am just gathering that information for the member. An estimated 80 per cent of Western Australians aged 15 years and over donate about 15.9 hours a month to the community. Their contribution equates to more than 315 million hours each year. The investment returns a person wellbeing benefit of \$9.9 billion annually. Volunteering is WA’s largest industry based on participation that delivers high returns to the community. The social, economic and cultural value of volunteering has been estimated at about \$39 billion of value annually. Every dollar invested in WA’s 5 000 volunteer-involved organisations returns \$4.50 in benefits to the community. In percentage terms, an estimated 80 per cent of Western Australia aged 15 years or over volunteer.

Ms M. BEARD: Are those volunteers in the numbers that the parliamentary secretary provided all registered through Volunteering WA?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Not every volunteer is registered through Volunteering WA. Please understand volunteers include P&C volunteers.

Ms M. BEARD: I wonder how the department collates that information and how those numbers are gathered.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: It is estimated.

Ms M. BEARD: Has the parliamentary secretary noticed a declining trend or has there been a change from last year’s number of volunteers?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: As I expect the member would presume, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, an estimated 64.2 per cent of Western Australian volunteers were stood down to comply with public health directives. However, an Australian National University report noted that, 12 months on, WA was the only state or territory to not experience a significant decline in overall participation.

Ms M. BEARD: What strategies does the department have in place to target and try to bolster the volunteer numbers? Is there some kind of particular targeted strategy in place through Volunteering WA?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Amongst other things, and to relate it back to the budget, one major strategy is the WA volunteering media campaign. The Department of Communities in collaboration with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet has developed collateral for a volunteer media campaign, including videos for YouTube and associated social media, radio advertisements, static digital content to be utilised from March to June 2023—right now. Creative content has been produced with the participation of volunteers representing Western Australian community groups, including Teach Learn Grow, WA Museum Boola Bardip, WA Maritime Museum and UWA Guild Volunteering in collaboration with the Perth Homeless Support Group. I can add to that if the member wishes. Other initiatives that recognise volunteering and, therefore, encourage participation are the WA Volunteer Service Awards, and we also host events around National Volunteer Week and International Volunteer Day that all add to the recruitment and celebration of volunteers.

Ms M. BEARD: This question relates to “Volunteering WA Digital Platform” on page 521. Are the St John Ambulance volunteers included in the numbers?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Is the member asking whether St John Ambulance volunteers are included in the estimated 80 per cent of people aged 15 years and over who volunteer?

Ms M. BEARD: Yes.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Yes.

Ms M. BEARD: Has there been any request to evaluate the base of volunteers and engage with them to see what the risk might be if St John Ambulance was privatised or that group of necessary volunteers, for want of a better word, were to become non-volunteers?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I am unclear how this relates to the budget papers.

Ms M. BEARD: I am asking has the department extracted from the digital platform any information on the numbers to which the parliamentary secretary referred, to identify the value for St John Ambulance volunteers versus all others in the system?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Not that we are aware of, no.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 5.58 to 7.00 pm