

Chair; Deputy Speaker; Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Jessica Shaw; Mr Bill Johnston

Division 1: Parliament —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Mr S.J. Price, Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Ms K. Robinson, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr R. Hunter, Executive Manager, Parliamentary Services Department.

Ms P. Traegde, Deputy Executive Manager, Parliamentary Services Department; Director, Member and Operational Support.

Ms B. Corey, Director, Parliamentary Information and Education, Parliamentary Services Department.

Ms R. Germano, Chief Finance Officer, Parliamentary Services Department.

[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, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before we start, I would like to say that I am here representing the Speaker, who is on leave at the moment.

The CHAIR: I give the call to the member for Cottesloe.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Chair, I seek your guidance: we do not ask any questions around the Legislative Council in this session; we ask questions about only the Legislative Assembly; is that correct?

The CHAIR: That is correct—the Legislative Assembly under Parliament in the state budget.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 34 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the table “Spending Changes”. Why is \$157 000 of funding required for the 2024–25 streamlined budget process incentive funding? I thought that improvement in the department was the responsibility of everyone and that was a normal activity that occurs. Why do we need what effectively amounts to an FTE salary to do that work?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I shall get Ms Robinson to answer that.

Ms K. Robinson: This is in relation to the streamlined budget process that occurs every year for most agencies across government. At the moment it is a 2.5 per cent additional cash appropriation as an incentive for not submitting a funding request—that is, a request that increases net debt across the budget and forward estimates period, so at any time during the 2024–25 budget year. This is something that we can apply for every year. We intend to use the funding in the next financial year for member and staff development and training and consulting services relating to system improvements.

Dr D.J. HONEY: What sorts of activities is it imagined will need to be streamlined or improved with that funding?

Ms K. Robinson: One of the things that could be looked at is, for example, the video wall that is very popular with members. There is a lot more that can be done to add more functionality. We might have former members or more on committees on that video wall. We are also looking at member and staff development. It is a good opportunity with the election next year to look at further member training and also staff development training in the next financial year.

Dr D.J. HONEY: In relation to the member training, it was not so long ago that I came in through that process. I think members still struggle when they come through the process and perhaps sometimes it is not until a member gets here that they do not know what they do not know. Are there any thoughts around supplementary or follow-up training for members once they have been here six months or so? It strikes me that a lot is learnt through making mistakes.

Ms K. Robinson: That is a good idea. We try to give new members in particular information about what they need to know when they first come into Parliament and not to overload them. We find that members are probably most captive to that training within the first six months, but we will certainly take that on board for other training and

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procedural training. We try to have training for Acting Speakers. We try to at least have regular sessions at which they can meet up and discuss chairing responsibilities. We also want to do more with committee chairs in the next Parliament. We will take on board those sorts of things.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Does any of that funding also end up going into education or around how we improve engagement with the community and the chamber? Most members love the engagement they have with the schoolkids who come through, and that is vitally important for our democracy and people's understanding of the role and importance of Parliament. Are there any thoughts around expanding that engagement? Would any of the funding go into that, or is that part of another function?

Ms K. Robinson: That streamlined budget process funding is purely for the Assembly because education comes under the PSD. I am not sure what budget it got this year. That is a separate process for parliamentary services. Ours is related just to the functions of the Assembly.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 34, division 1, Legislative Assembly spending changes. The bottom line refers to the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal. There is a bit of a spike this year. Why is that amount so much more than it was in previous years and is estimated to be in later years?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will ask Ms Robinson to respond.

Ms K. Robinson: That relates to a couple of things stemming from the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal's determination from last July. On 1 July 2023, SAT determined to increase members' salaries and allowances, including a cost-of-living increase of \$3 000 per member and anticipated transition payments for the next election.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The member for Cannington is waving his hands around! Is this because it is an election year and Parliament is expecting a large number of people to be tipped out of Parliament? Is that what is being said, Deputy Speaker? How many members do we expect to lose?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, that is not what we are saying, member.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: We expect the member for Moore to be the first member!

Mr R.S. LOVE: The member for Moore certainly will be no more because Moore will be no more! The question is whether he will be the member for Mid-West!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 40, paragraph 4, which refers to the "Maintenance of the historic Parliament House". Obviously, I am noting the \$2.9 million to replace the large air-conditioning chiller unit for the chambers. Can the Deputy Speaker explain the digitising of Parliament's broadcasting and voting system?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will ask Mr Hunter to respond to that question, please.

Mr R. Hunter: In relation to the chiller, I have a correction for the member for Roe. The \$2.9 million is for the chiller and the digitisation, which actually means the division bells. As most members would have unfortunately experienced, the division bells are not reliable and occasionally members may miss a division or not hear that one is being held. Our old analogue system was established in the 1960s and it is prone to fail, so we will undertake a re-cabing of the entire building and amplification of the signal in a digital format, as well as use some of the technology pathways to integrate the bell systems and doors et cetera, which are currently separate. That is what the money is for. That came about from a request through Treasury's asset investment program, so we were lucky to get that money. We have been very fortunate.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the timetable for the installation of both the air-conditioning chiller unit and the digitisation?

Mr R. Hunter: We hope to achieve this in the summer recess—that is, the end of this year, beginning of next year.

Dr D.J. HONEY: One of the issues that I perennially have with the building is weak wi-fi access. Does part of that program include improving the wi-fi signal throughout the building?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hunter.

Mr R. Hunter: No, that does not include wi-fi.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Are there any plans to upgrade the wi-fi network, because it is a perennial problem, although not everywhere in the building? I am not having a special whinge for my benefit, because I know that it affects other people. For example, sometimes there is a slow email update when people are urgently waiting for something. Are there any proposals to look at that? I know that, periodically, little spot things are put around.

Mr R. Hunter: We are always looking at the wi-fi. Recently, we spent a considerable amount of money improving the wi-fi, so I hope that people are experiencing better wi-fi. Some of the smart TVs around the building were putting an extra load on the wi-fi. The member said quite correctly that it is a perennial issue. Our process is to review the wi-fi, test the signal and, where it is weak, try to improve the access points. The access point increases were almost doubled in the last financial year. Hopefully, people are experiencing that. But there are areas in the building where, unfortunately, because of the fabric, the signal is very flaky. That is difficult to overcome, but we are constantly doing that.

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Dr D.J. HONEY: A related area is mobile phone access. Are any boosters installed within the building for mobile phone common networks?

Mr R. Hunter: I do not know whether there are any boosters. I think we had some installed across the road. Does anyone know?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ms Corey.

Ms B. Corey: No, we do not have boosters for our mobile phone signal but we are currently working with Telstra to investigate that as an option for Parliament House.

Ms J.J. SHAW: I refer to page 39, budget paper No 2, volume 1, “Parliamentary Services”, and more specifically the total cost of services. I would like to ask a question about security at Parliament House. I am sure that the Deputy Speaker is aware that over the years, and certainly in my two terms as a member, we have had security incidents in which, for example, things have been thrown over the balcony and onto members as they sit in the chamber, which have prompted a considerable upgrade around the building for access and egress. Subsequent works were done to install bollards to prevent an attack by a vehicle. I want to flag that during COVID, there were some very aggressive protests at the access points to Parliament House, during which members were spat at, abused and jostled as they tried to enter the south entrance door of Parliament House, which is very open to the public. More recently, every day when we turn up, there is a regular protest. Those people are lovely folk and very peaceful in the way that they protest. I am quite sympathetic to the issues they raise. Nonetheless, members need to walk through them when they come in. As I am sure the Deputy Speaker would appreciate, we are increasingly seeing random folks outside the building who do very strange things. I have visited a number of Parliaments at which it is safe for members to access and egress, particularly in the evening. They have a secure way to get from their cars into Parliament. I observe that there are shortcomings in that regard.

The CHAIR: Member for Swan Hills!

Ms J.J. SHAW: Sure. I would appreciate a view on what assessments have been done to increase security for members for access and egress to Parliament House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hunter.

Mr R. Hunter: That is quite a broad question. I will stay away from the specifics and talk in more general terms. We are always reviewing our security and incrementally things are introduced. For example, we require identification from people prior to entry into the public galleries. We are implementing systems more broadly across Parliament to allow us to identify troubled people. One of the limitations, which is quite challenging, is that on the parliamentary reserve, only one person is authorised to give a person a direction to cease their disruptive behaviour; that person is me. People become quite clever at working out that I cannot be in two spots at the same time. They will undertake an activity in one place then move to another place. I am quite often at the south door entrance monitoring people’s behaviour and talking to them. We have great support from the protective service unit, the police officers who are here.

We need to look at things such as parliamentary precinct legislation so that we can spread out the authority of people within the organisation to give directions. We also have—again, talking in general terms—watchlists on which people are identified as being problematic. What we cannot identify is when a person not known to us suddenly arrives and agitates. But we have the benefit of reasonably good monitoring of CCTV so preventively we can sometimes see activities, but not always. It is the people who come in a covert way who are difficult to detect. The member referenced other Parliaments having, if you like, a secured entrance and egress. The challenge with that is that that would create a screening centre, if you like. Members would have to go through a screening centre and corridor, a bit like what people do when they go through an airport. We have looked at that. We have that in our out years budget as an investment whereby we will process people a bit further away from the building. They will come through with a pass; no-one can get through. But that is a big investment and not our highest priority.

[9.20 am]

Ms J.J. SHAW: Has any thought been given to providing more secure car parking so that people can safely walk between their car and the building?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just before I hand over to Mr Hunter, I will make a comment that we are not being evasive in the response to a lot of this, but we just need to be careful about how much information we provide to the public about the things we are undertaking.

Mr R. Hunter: Yes, that is also being considered—whether to look at secure fencing with something a bit like a pillbox to get in. That is also a very expensive proposition. It is also probably not one of the most critical areas of security that we should focus on because it is a very public open space. It can be accessed from a number of different areas. Someone can be concealed behind a bush or something like that, and a fence does not necessarily protect people from things coming over the top or people finding other ways. People with malicious intent generally

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find a way to break through a system. For us, we need to identify the highest risks and put the resources into that; that probably would not be one of them.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Turning to page 39 of the *Budget statements*, I refer to “Government Office Accommodation” under spending changes. It will increase to \$391 000 this year, \$445 000 the next and \$500 000 thereon. That is the new offices at 2 Parliament Place. What is the status of that building? Is there more to be done? Is an extra piece anticipated to be leased or why is there that increase in the out years? If the Deputy Speaker could just run us through the situation with that building, that would be good.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will ask Mr Hunter to respond to that.

Mr R. Hunter: Firstly, the increase in lease costs is because, previously, the buildings were annex buildings—the Assembly, Council and Parliamentary Services Department had separate buildings, so each department maintained its own lease. With the amalgamation of all those departments into one building, the lease costs have been transferred to the Parliamentary Services Department to manage on behalf of the departments. Therefore, we see an increase in the cost. The expense in the line item that the member referred to will increase, but we are completely funded for that amount. As that increases, Government Accommodation will give us that money as well.

In response to the question that relates to the purpose of the building—what we are doing—and whether we will sublease or lease, as the member referred to, we will occupy the third floor. Patricia is doing a lot of work with the management on the third floor development, along with some of the broadcasting and IT requirements being done by Belinda. The top floor will accommodate most of the Hansard reporters; they will go across there. I think we are looking at about January as commencement of occupancy. That floor will also have some meeting facilities. One of the great shortages in this building is that there is nowhere for us to meet; I am talking about larger groups. We will establish, basically, a theatre room with seating for 50 people, a meeting room for 25 and a smaller meeting room for 12. We will have meeting room facilities available for members of Parliament and parliamentary departments on that top floor as well.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Are the hearing rooms that are already in place in the Council and Assembly sections available for members of Parliament to use for meetings or are they strictly only for the use of committees, Deputy Speaker?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hunter.

Mr R. Hunter: I could not comment on the committee rooms because that relates to the house, so I think I would probably go back to Kirsten on whether those rooms are available.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ms Robinson.

Ms K. Robinson: I do not think we have actually considered that. They obviously have priority for committees. Certainly, across the road here, the LA meeting room is available for members. We have to consider whether we would be able to open those up. I am not sure. We would have to get back to the member on that.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I have a further question on that topic through you, Deputy Speaker: it would not be appropriate, of course, for ministers to use the committee rooms because that would be a conflict between the executive and Parliament; is that correct?

Ms K. Robinson: I think that that would be an issue, but this is something that the new Clerk can have a think about!

Mr R.S. LOVE: The new Clerk is not here!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Next year!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Would the Deputy Speaker be able to estimate the number of offices that will change as far as members of Parliament in the next Parliament go? Obviously, there are a lot of shared offices and so on at the moment. What will the restructure look like?

Mr R. Hunter: When we decant staff across the road to the new level 3, that will free up some spaces here. We hope to turn over some of those spaces to members to create more members’ offices. At the moment, about 50 per cent of members are sharing, and we hope to improve that by, say, four offices at this stage, which means we can either have more people sharing or more people with individual offices. We also need to address some of the shortcomings we have with accommodation. For example, we do not currently have a quiet room or a prayer room. We want to look at whether we can establish another meeting room, which is in very high demand on sitting days. By having staff going across the road, we will create more operational space here on a sitting day, which is our goal.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: When Mr Hunter talks about a prayer room and so forth, what is the driving force behind that? Are certain religions in mind? Could further information on that be provided, please.

Mr R. Hunter: Inclusion and diversity would suggest that to have a prayer room is a very good practice, particularly for people who have that regime on a daily basis and require a quiet space. It would not be appropriate for them to do things like that in a shared work environment. Sometimes they are dual-purpose, by the way. The quiet room

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might be used when someone is feeling unwell. It does not necessarily mean a prayer room and a quiet room; it may be a quiet room that can be used as a prayer room as well.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have a new question on an old question. I refer to budget paper No 2 and the appropriation table at the top of page 39. Just going back to the question that the member for Swan Hills raised about security and the ability to direct people, Mr Hunter indicated that he is the only officer who can give direction on this site. That sounds like a limitation on the effective maintenance of security on the site and being able to respond urgently. As Mr Hunter said, some willing folk delight in disrupting our day, so I wonder: would a legislative change be required to allow that authority to be delegated? From my point of view, it would seem very sensible for Mr Hunter to have the authority to delegate that to his staff as required on any given day.

Mr R. Hunter: Let me, firstly, distinguish between criminality and unsocial behaviour. Obviously, for criminality I do not need to do anything because the police can exercise their powers. In relation to antisocial behaviour, yes, that will require me under the Parliamentary Reserve Board and its by-laws, as the secretary, to act, basically, as a sheriff. When I talk about being the only person who can exercise those powers, I mean that I am the only one—that is, my position—who can initiate those powers. However, I can co-opt others to assist me. If I am in a situation in which I need assistance, as long as it is reasonably clear that I have asked a person to assist, that person is able to render assistance and be afforded the same protections under the law as I would as the secretary/sheriff. There are ways to do it, but that initial contact needs to be done by me. Our preference would be to see legislative change around parliamentary precinct legislation whereby we identify about 10 people within the organisation—which would naturally fall to positions like the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Usher of the Black Rod, the Clerks, the Presiding Officers—who can exercise that power directly. Once that direction has been given to a person to cease doing what they are doing or to move off the reserve, they have to comply; otherwise, they are in breach of the law, and then we exercise a follow-up process with the police.

[9.30 am]

Dr D.J. HONEY: Has Mr Hunter approached the government or the relevant minister—I am assuming it is the Premier, but I am not sure—with that suggestion? It sounds like a really good suggestion and something for which I am sure he will get willing support in this chamber.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I know there has been conversations about possible changes and what is required for that to happen, but I am not aware of any direct conversations. Maybe Mr Hunter could respond to that point.

Mr R. Hunter: The approach to security around Parliaments is pretty much the same. Other jurisdictions have legislation. We have been working by getting their information and working with the police et cetera to develop something. We have had conversations, but we have not progressed anything at this point. One of the areas that we would really like to capture is the new building at 2 Parliament Place. My authority as a sheriff, if you like, ceases at the reserve. As I cross the road, I do not have any further powers. We are currently looking at which trespass laws are applicable to determine whether a person who is responsible for a work area can give a direction for someone to remove themselves from that area. I believe those powers exist. We are just seeking some advice on that.

Ms J.J. SHAW: How frequently are those powers that Mr Hunter has spoken about exercised?

Mr R. Hunter: It would depend on the week. Not everybody who has antisocial behaviour understands the sittings of Parliament. Some of our more serious events sometimes occur when Parliament is not sitting. I am not avoiding the question; I am coming to the answer for it. It is not a predictable pattern, although there is a consistency around the Parliament's sittings. There tends to be more of them, I would say, on a busy week. It might be two or three times in that week, but other times it might be not at all. If I go to the last sitting block, I think there were two occasions on which a person was held at a door waiting for me to arrive to give the direction. There was a little bit of argy-bargy, and then they finally complied. Ultimately, they know that it will result in a charge, and very likely a conviction if they do not adhere to it.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hunter.

The appropriation was recommended.