

Legal Aid Commission of Western Australia —

Mrs M.R. Marshall, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Attorney General.

Ms H. De Brito, Director, Legal Aid.

Ms Y. Zhou, Manager of Strategy, Budgeting and Reporting.

Mr J. Lee, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. Questions must relate to the operations and budget of the off-budget authority. I will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point.

The Attorney General may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the Attorney General to clearly indicate what information he agrees 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 the Attorney General suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

Are there any questions? The Leader of the Liberal Party.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 448 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2. Over the past 12 months, given increasing cost-of-living pressures, how much legal advice has been provided on mortgage hardship, credit law matters and debts such as strata title fees and council rates? Is the commission able to provide that information?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That is a deep dive! I will refer that to the director of Legal Aid, Ms Helen De Brito.

Ms H. De Brito: I will need to take that question on notice to provide specific numbers.

The CHAIR: Technically speaking, the Attorney either provides supplementary information or the opposition has to formally ask for a question on notice.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: We will provide supplementary information. As I said, it is a deep dive into the databank.

Ms L. METTAM: It is a deep dive.

The CHAIR: Attorney General, can you indicate what you will be providing?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will provide supplementary information into —

Ms L. METTAM: Could it be provided over the past two years, just to see what the growth in demand has been?

The CHAIR: Is the member after figures for the calendar or financial years?

Ms L. METTAM: Whatever is easier. The financial year will work.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: For the financial years 2022–23 and 2023–24?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: In relation to legal advice for mortgage stress —

Ms L. METTAM: Yes, and credit law matters and debts, such as strata fees or council rates—so, relating to financial hardship.

The CHAIR: Is that too broad, Attorney General? We might get an indication from your adviser whether that is too broad or manageable.

Ms H. De Brito: I am confident that we can provide that information.

[*Supplementary Information No A29.*]

Ms L. METTAM: How many cases did Legal Aid take to trial over that two-year period?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Can I get clarification on that? The commission gives legal assistance to a number of jurisdictions—criminal trials in the Supreme Court, criminal trials in the District Court, trials in the Magistrates Court and some trials in the Family Court, especially by way of an independent children’s legal representative. There are four areas there. Does the member want just a global figure?

Ms L. METTAM: Can we have a breakdown over the past two years for those four areas?

Ms H. De Brito: The number of grants of aid that went to trial is something we could provide.

The CHAIR: Attorney, can you indicate what is the subject of the supplementary information?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The supplementary information provided will be in relation to the number of grants of aid for trials in the Supreme, District, Magistrates and Family Courts in the financial years 2022–23 and 2023–24.

[*Supplementary Information No A30.*]

[4.40 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 448. Can the Attorney General update the record on how many staff are employed by Legal Aid and provide it, maybe by supplementary information, by role and FTE?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: By role?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: There are so many roles. Would the member be satisfied with how many professional staff are on board as opposed to non-professional staff?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will provide that information. When I say professional, I mean legal staff versus non-legal staff. I will provide supplementary information on how many legal staff versus non-legal staff are employed at the Legal Aid Commission.

Ms L. METTAM: That sounds good.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Sorry, we might have that information. I defer to Ms De Brito.

Ms H. De Brito: For this financial year, we have 197 legal staff and 172 administrative staff. We also have paralegals, who are classified as legal staff. We have graduates, seven social workers and three community liaison and education officers, with a total FTE of 445.

Ms M. BEARD: Is there a breakdown between metro and regional available?

Ms H. De Brito: We do not have that breakdown.

Ms L. METTAM: Can a breakdown for the nine different offices be provided?

Ms H. De Brito: That number does fluctuate; however, I could provide the number of people delivering the services in the regions at a specific point in time.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Can we do that to, say, 31 March 2024?

Ms L. METTAM: That sounds reasonable. I have a final question.

The CHAIR: I am sorry. I have to allocate a number.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: We will provide the number of legal staff and non-legal staff in the nine regional offices as at 31 March 2024.

[*Supplementary Information No A31.*]

Ms L. METTAM: I have a general question.

The CHAIR: Will that be a further question, member for Vasse?

Ms L. METTAM: It is a further question. How many volunteers does Legal Aid currently have?

Ms H. De Brito: Thank you. That is another number that fluctuates and it would be very difficult to provide the member with an accurate estimation at this point in time. Like the previous question, I could provide the member with the number of volunteers we had as at 31 March.

The CHAIR: Can the Attorney General repeat what he will be providing?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Supplementary information will be provided to show how many volunteers were with the Legal Aid Commission as at 31 March 2024. Is the member happy with that?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Thank you.

[*Supplementary Information No A32.*]

The CHAIR: I suspect the member for North West Central will want them allocated as regional and metropolitan. Am I correct?

Ms M. BEARD: My further question is: Does the Attorney General have the number of vacancies in the regions? Are there any vacancies?

The CHAIR: That is a completely different question. Sorry, I wrongly anticipated.

Ms H. De Brito: Again, that is a question that requires a breakdown, office to office. Yes, we do have a number of vacancies in some of our regional offices. I would need to provide that information as at 31 March.

Ms M. BEARD: Is that possible?

Ms H. De Brito: Yes.

Ms M. BEARD: Thank you.

The CHAIR: We should move on.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, we are all ready to move on from Legal Aid.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of the Legal Aid Commission of Western Australia.