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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Wednesday, 22 May 2024

Legislative Assembly

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ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am.

North Metropolitan TAFE —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms S.F. McGurk, Minister for Training and Workforce Development.

Ms H.M. Beazley, Minister Assisting the Minister for Training and Workforce Development.

Ms K. Ho, Director General.

Ms G. Husk, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms M. Hoad, Managing Director.

Ms J. Wallace, Executive Director, Policy Planning and Innovation.

Ms E. Paterson, Executive Director, Service Resource Management.

Mr A. Walker, Director, Service Delivery Operations.

Mr G. Thompson, Executive Director, Corporate.

Dr S. Gallacher, Chief of Staff, Minister for Training and Workforce Development.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: Minister, will you set out the order in which we are doing things?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you very much. I thank everyone for being here. I know I have quite a large contingent of agencies, so thank you to everyone for coming along. Before I start, I know a lot of people here have orange on because it is a day to acknowledge the work of volunteers, and I am sure there will be many volunteers riveted to the viewing of budget estimates this morning; thank you.

We have nine agencies here today, so I wanted to thank them all for being here. We have WorkCover WA here; I understand from talking to opposition representatives that we will have some questions of them but today we will begin the proceedings with North Metropolitan TAFE, so I have Minister Beazley here to assist with some of the questions.

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. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point.

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.

I give the call to member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I thank the minister, advisers and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Training and Workforce Development. My question relates to page 390 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. I refer to the 2023–24 estimated actual number of employees listed —

The CHAIR: Sorry, member. We are doing the North Metropolitan TAFE.

Ms L. METTAM: This is under training and workforce development.

The CHAIR: Yes, but this is the off-budget part of that, from page 394. It is specifically North Metro TAFE.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Are we doing on-budget next?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to TAFE colleges on page 394 and the overall asset investment program under “North Metropolitan TAFE”. I have a question about the number of employees that are part of or supported by that asset investment program. How many employees at North Metropolitan TAFE work as lecturers, tutors and teachers? I am not sure whether I can ask that here or in the training section.

Ms S.F. McGURK: We are happy to take the specific question about the number of employees at North Metropolitan TAFE. I have here not only the minister assisting, but also the managing director of North Metropolitan TAFE. I will see whether she is able to answer that question.

Ms M. Hoad: Thank you, minister. In 2024, we have about 835 lecturers and about 490 support staff.

Ms L. METTAM: How many lecturers are required to deliver all classes and units at North Metropolitan TAFE?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to the managing director.

Ms M. Hoad: At the moment we are fully staffed, so 835 are meeting expectations and delivering classes. We have some scalability around casual staff, but we are essentially meeting all the class requirements. The 835 lecturers are delivering our full profile of classes scheduled.

Ms L. METTAM: Is there currently a shortage? I appreciate the response that we have received, but are there any shortages or is every single unit and class fully staffed?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I thank the member. I am happy to divert to —

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is a bit confusing, because of the assistant minister. Is there any problem with Hannah taking the questions?

The CHAIR: No, not at all, but it still has to come through you.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Okay, I will hand over directly to the managing director again.

Ms M. Hoad: Thank you, minister. At the moment we have no lecturing shortages. We have very good recruitment processes. We work closely with industry and all classes are addressed by lecturer availability.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will supplement that answer because TAFE lecturer shortages have been the subject of some discussion. I will make a general comment apart from North Metropolitan TAFE. The colleges are experiencing managing short-term staffing vacancies without disruption to students. It is becoming difficult for some of our regional TAFE locations to achieve that due to geographical challenges, particularly in a tight labour market. We have instigated a \$2.9 million temporary regional incentive initiative for the 2024 calendar year to help regional TAFE colleges attract and retain lecturers in the Pilbara, Kimberley and Kalgoorlie. The colleges have implemented a range of recruitment strategies to attract lecturers including a sector-wide TAFE lecturer recruitment campaign to attract skilled professionals from industry to lecturing positions across TAFE colleges. They have reported that it has been a very successful recruitment campaign, with approximately 1 330 applications received across all the TAFE colleges.

[9.10 am]

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister Beazley, my apologies. You and Minister McGurk can both answer questions.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Thank you, chair.

Ms L. METTAM: At any point in the 2023–24 financial year to date has North Metro TAFE pulled lecturers from a course because of an expected impending shortage in another course, leading to a disruption; and, if so, which courses does that relate to?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Could the member repeat the question?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes. At any point in the 2023–24 financial year to date has North Metro TAFE pulled lecturers from other courses because of an expected impending shortage, leading to a disruption for students; and, if so, which courses?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: At that level of operational detail, I will defer to the managing director.

Ms M. Hoad: Thank you, minister. Lecturers are assigned, reassigned and timetabled to different units depending on their specific skills. We have very strong regulatory requirements around lecturers' currency and competency to deliver. It is absolutely a bit of a juggling act to get the right people in front of the right classes, so there is a lot of movement amongst lecturers on a regular basis, particularly as new lecturers come in with particular specialised skill sets. I am not aware of any specific cases in which anyone has moved because of a lecturer shortage or because of an anticipated shortage, but there is rescheduling of lecturers to classes all the time throughout the entire industry areas.

Ms L. METTAM: Have any courses been cancelled in the last financial year due to staff shortages; and, if so, which courses?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Specifically in North Metro TAFE?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Not to my knowledge, but I will confirm with the managing director.

Ms M. Hoad: There was a miscommunication and one class was temporarily postponed, but that was really just a miscommunication and it was rescheduled straightaway.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The member for Vasse asked whether any courses were cancelled, but I think the managing director's answer was related to a class. Can I clarify that there has never been a course cancelled?

Ms M. HOAD: Sorry—absolutely. No course was cancelled; it was just a class.

Ms L. METTAM: I was referring in my last question to the light fabrication unit. As I understand it, student construction workers were advised that it had been cancelled due to staff shortages, and they were left in limbo, as they described it, for two weeks. Is the minister able to provide any more clarification on that? Was there always going to be a temporary pause on that course? The situation did not appear to be resolved until questions were asked.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: It is actually not the case that it was only after external questions were asked that the situation was resolved. My advice on the light fabrication course that the member is talking about is that one of the staff members took some unscheduled leave and, without authorisation, an administration officer sent out advice to students that there may be some delay to the course as a result. But, in fact, as I said, that advice was not authorised and the course was able to proceed. The class was able to proceed and the full course was able to proceed because staff were able to fill those temporary gaps, which occurred as a result of staff leave, not staff shortages.

I will ask the assisting minister if she has anything further to add.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: No, I do not. I have nothing further to add, thank you.

Ms L. METTAM: The circumstances around the delay to this course were not communicated to the students until after questions were raised by *The West Australian*, and it was also communicated that the course would not continue for the rest of the year. Does the minister have anything further to clarify?

Ms S.F. MCGURK: I will hand over to the managing director to give some confirmation about the chronology of events. As I said, my advice is that an administration officer sent out advice to students and employers in the area affected without authorisation and before proper arrangements could be made for the temporary leave that had been taken, rather than any ongoing staff vacancies, but I will hand over to the managing director.

Ms M. HOAD: Thank you, minister. The minister's statements are correct. It was an unauthorised response, somewhat offhandedly sent out by a client services officer. The team was, in fact, swinging in behind and making sure that the class could continue; that was already in train by the management of the portfolio that delivers the course.

Ms L. METTAM: As far as the minister is aware, have any other classes or courses been affected in this way due to temporary leave or staff shortages?

Ms S.F. MCGURK: If the member is asking specifically about North Metro TAFE, that is one thing. If the member is asking across the whole TAFE system, she will understand that with thousands of lecturing staff and courses being delivered, it is not the case that lecturing staff are allocated to particular courses and that is all. It is a fluid situation whereby depending on student numbers and demand at the time, people can be moved around. As the managing director said, it is obviously also dependent on the lecturing staff's technical expertise. They are authorised and accredited to deliver certain subjects. It is not my understanding that any staff shortages have caused the cancellation of particular classes or courses, but it is the case that we continue to prioritise staff recruitment and retention in and across the TAFE colleges. They are a crucial part of the operations. They are valued, and it is competitive at the moment to attract and retain them in the system.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of the North Metropolitan TAFE authority.

[9.20 am]

Division 25: Training and Workforce Development —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms S.F. McGurk, Minister for Training and Workforce Development.

Ms H.M. Beazley, Minister Assisting the Minister for Training and Workforce Development.

Ms K. Ho, Director General.

Mr G. Thompson, Executive Director, Corporate.

Ms J. Wallace, Executive Director, Policy, Planning and Innovation.

Ms E. Paterson, Executive Director, Service Resource Management.

Mr A. Walker, Director, Service Delivery Operations.

Ms G. Husk, Chief Finance Officer.

Dr S. Gallacher, Chief of Staff, Minister for Training and Workforce Development.

[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.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the line item “Ongoing Initiatives: Construction Migration Office” at the bottom of page 376 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. The minister’s media statement of 9 May 2024 states that the new office will cost taxpayers \$4.3 million; however, the total cost in this budget paper is \$6.422 million. That is a 33 per cent hike on the announcement the minister made a few days ago. Can the minister explain the difference between the budget and the media statement?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The Construction Migration Office was established to provide end-to-end support for WA building and construction sector employers seeking to recruit workers through a skilled visa pathway. One of the challenges in the construction industry is that many of the businesses are small to medium-sized enterprises and they find it difficult to navigate sponsoring staff or identifying skilled staff from overseas who might want to come to Western Australia to work. Giving the state agency the capacity to assist workers has been part of what we have prioritised in the last couple of years. It is not something that state agencies traditionally have done. I will hand over to Mr Thompson to talk specifically about the spending changes, but the member would be aware that the visa subsidy program has had money allocated to it. We have talked about that in particular. That program of work has been attempted by our office. I am happy to talk to that, but I might hand over to Graham.

Mr G. Thompson: Just to clarify, is the member seeking information on the “Construction Migration Office” line in the spending changes table?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am looking at the ongoing initiatives. The line item adds up to a total of \$6.422 million.

Mr G. Thompson: There are two items. The “Construction Migration Office” line is the FTE and staffing to administer the program and support employers, and then there is the “Construction Visa Subsidy Program”, which are the actual subsidies paid. They are two separate lines. I cannot comment on the other figures, but that is what makes up those two components in the spending changes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many employers does this office hope to assist?

Ms S.F. McGURK: If I can talk specifically about the construction visa subsidy program, 306 employers have registered for that program. That is how many have been involved in that program, but the Construction Migration Office will of course field inquiries from many more. A big part of that office’s work has been to work with the peak bodies, including the Housing Industry Association and the Master Builders Association, to run information sessions in both the metropolitan area and regional WA about the supports that are available for construction employers looking to source skilled staff from overseas.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: If it is being funded, which parts of the migration application process will the department be paying for? Is it all through the department or is there some from the construction training fund as well?

Ms S.F. McGURK: If we are talking specifically about the construction visa subsidy program, that program is run by the department and funded by the state government.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Could I ask a further question on this?

The CHAIR: The member for Roe is asking questions at the moment.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I just want to clarify an answer that was just given on that very topic.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will come back to it after the clarification.

The CHAIR: Member for Cannington.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Would the construction industry training fund be permitted to give subsidies to bring international workers into WA?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No. Its legislation would prohibit it from being able to do that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How does this affect migration services that work on a fee-paying basis?

[9.30 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: The program gives a \$10 000 subsidy for eligible employers to access assistance if they want to bring skilled workers into the construction industry in Western Australia. Some of that \$10 000 can be used to

subsidise a migration agent, who is qualified and authorised to do that work. Their department cannot do that work—it is prohibited from doing it—but some of the \$10 000 payment made to employers can be used to offset the cost of a migration agent.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I want to go back to an answer from the minister on the Construction Migration Office. The amounts for that line item add to \$6.422 million, yet a press release was put out only about 12 days ago saying it was going to be \$4.3 million. What was the thinking behind that?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am sorry; I do not have to hand the press release the member is talking about, but I think he is talking about a decision to extend the work of the Construction Migration Office for another 12 months. It was a budget decision to do that. In the budget papers, we are talking about the existing funding that was allocated to the migration office and the capacity that is being established within the Department of Training and Workforce Development to provide that sort of advice and assistance, particularly to individual employers. It is also to work with peak bodies so we can start to understand the industry requirements and then we can assist. Obviously, migration services are largely the responsibility of the federal government, but we know that employers and their peak bodies have asked for assistance in being able to triage and navigate that system, which is something the state government has listened to.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister able to provide supplementary information about the disparity between her press release and the budget papers?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There is no disparity between the budget papers and the press release. The press release is talking about additional money that was put into the state budget to extend the work of the Construction Migration Office. That is reflected in the budget papers. As I said, we are putting in significant new funds to meet the demands of individual employers in the construction industry in Western Australia in particular, where we know there are pressures. We are also putting significant amounts of money into training Western Australians, which I am very happy to talk about as well. Where we cannot meet demand and while we are training people, and it takes time to skill people up, we understand that skilled migration will be part of the solution.

Ms L. METTAM: I know we are dealing intermittently with two different line items. The construction visa subsidy program was touched on as part of this, but I appreciate that the member for Roe's recent question was on the migration office. On the construction visa subsidy program, how many visas has the department funded over the past two years? How many have been unsuccessful?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Under the construction visa subsidy program, we do not pay for the visas as such. We pay a \$10 000 subsidy to the employer. This commenced on 1 July 2023. What are called milestone 3 payments are effectively for people who are on the ground working and have been successful in gaining a visa. Milestone 2 payments are paid when the employer can give evidence that their sponsored migrant has been granted a visa and 247 people have received a milestone 2 payment. The scheme has been in place only since 1 July 2023, not for two years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Why is there no funding in the forward estimates for this construction visa subsidy program?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The program is new. It was put in place as a result of the Housing Industry Association in particular advocating that its members, particularly small and medium-sized businesses, needed some assistance navigating the migration scheme. Of course, this was off the back of the federal government significantly cutting our state nominated migration program numbers. Last year, it was 8 100 and it dropped down to 2 300 or thereabouts. The benefit of that scheme is that employers do not have to nominate. It is a very flexible scheme and it really suits small and medium-sized businesses. Off the back of that, the Housing Industry Association advocated to government that we needed a bespoke scheme here in Western Australia for that industry to suit small and medium-sized businesses. We listened to industry and, as a result, in May 2023 announced there would be a program set up to help support up to 1 100 employers with a \$10 000 grant. That is why it is a finite program. We will assess the ongoing nature of that program as we move through.

In fact, a media release was put out on this by the Housing Industry Association just last week. I would like to read from that media release, dated 15 May 2024 —

Critical reports today of the Construction Visa Subsidy Program do nothing but pour cold water on ideas that take time to deliver.

...

In July 2023 the WA State Government launched a targeted program to support WA employers who were interested in attracting migrants with construction skills to Australia.

The WA Government took this step as a result of the Federal Government slashing State Nominated Migration Visas ... in the middle of a housing and a skills crisis.

HIA WA Executive Director Michael McGowan said HIA supports the program as one of several initiatives to help build more homes.

He goes on to say —

“Skilled migration has not been something that WA building companies have traditionally engaged in, but for those that have, the feedback has been extremely positive.

He also said —

“What we have seen is WA employers dipping their toes in the water to see how it works. It has worked, and we now expect most of the 1100 spots to be taken up and workers arriving in Australia over the next 12 months,” ...

“Our industry has been built on a foundation of migrants moving to Australia looking for a new life and this program continues the tradition.”

[9.40 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thanks, minister, for that information. Given the recent federal budget, I am curious to know whether the minister has had any indication from her federal Labor colleagues about boosting those numbers back up to 6 000, 8 000 or whatever it might be?

Ms S.F. McGURK: This is an important part of the ongoing discussions that we are having with the federal government so that it understands the particular labour workforce needs here in Western Australia and how, at times, they are counter-cyclical with those around the rest of the country. We have consistently requested 10 000 places in the state nominated migration program, which is what we have done in the past. As we have discussed, and as the member for Roe pointed out, the commonwealth government allocated 2 300 this financial year, all of which have been taken up. I continue to have discussions with particularly Minister Giles and Minister O’Neil about the need to listen to WA industry needs and increase that number and look at other pathways that we could employ to meet the skilled worker shortages in WA. I particularly acknowledge the discussions my office has had with Minister O’Neil’s office to unblock the timeframes with the construction visa program. We have had examples in which people are waiting on visas applied for under the construction visa program. We were able to have direct discussions with Minister O’Neil’s office to get some of the visas processed, for which I am grateful.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 376 and the line item third from the bottom, “TAFE Lecturer Return to Industry”. Can the minister provide a run-down of how that program works? Paragraph 4 on the next page refers to lecturers updating their knowledge of current industry standards. My understanding is that one of the biggest challenges in getting industry people to lecture at TAFE is when a person is at the tail end of their working career, if you like, and they have to learn the standards, do the paperwork and the like that is involved with lecturing. I am curious about the minister’s comments about this section. There are budget items for the years ahead; what does that program entail?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I understand that the member is talking about two aspects; one is the TAFE lecturer return-to-industry program, which I will talk about, and the other is the additional requirements that someone working in industry—for instance, a chef or a tradesperson—has to fulfil to become a TAFE lecturer or a vocational training lecturer. There are two separate questions.

The TAFE lecturer return-to-industry program was put in place by my predecessor, Hon Sue Ellery, and it has been very successful. It involves lecturing TAFE staff returning to industry to undertake professional development. We have allocated money for that to happen so that people can be backfilled into their positions to allow them to take paid leave and spend time in their industry to keep their skills current. I was pleased to go to Rio Tinto’s remote automated facility near Perth Airport to see an example of a remote operations facility in which TAFE staff had spent time to understand how it all works. I have other examples. North Metropolitan TAFE lecturer Jackson Lee, who works in laboratory operations, worked at ALS Global, which is a laboratory operator. He said that it was great spending time there and understanding what chemical analysis is needed. Another example is Ian Frost, who works at South Regional TAFE. He was able to undertake a placement at Best Western Plus Hotel Lord Forrest in Bunbury. He said that doing that was really good for not only developing his skills and making sure that they are industry current in an operating hotel in a regional area, but also the relationship between the hotel and TAFE. We have allocated \$9.9 million over four years to make sure that that can happen.

It is challenging at times, because if we take TAFE staff out of a college, we have to replace them with people with the right skills. We are committed to making sure that happens. As I said, it has two solid benefits; one is making sure that lecturing staff keep their skills current and understanding what is happening in industry and the other is strengthening ties between industry and TAFE colleges. Before I finish talking about that, last year in 2023, as a result of that funding, 428 TAFE lecturers took leave and were able to spend time in industry. To date, 56 lecturers had participated in the program by the end of term 1. It is getting practical take-up.

The second question was about the formal qualifications that someone in industry needs to work in TAFE. I will hand over to Karen Ho, who will talk about what a certificate IV in training and assessment involves.

Ms K. Ho: A certificate iv in training and assessment is the minimum qualification needed to lecture at TAFE. All the colleges are able to deliver that qualification. The recruitment campaigns that have taken place have enabled

them to look for and take in people who have industry skills and experience and give them that qualification while they get ready for classroom delivery. There is definitely a pathway for people with industry experience to get that qualification. The qualification is also on the fee-free list to remove any affordability barriers to that pathway.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: In relation to regional TAFEs, are there any shortages in particular trades areas and the like because of the certificate IV requirements? Are any regional areas struggling to find lecturers in certain fields?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to Ms Ho to answer that question, but it is important to understand that skill shortages in regional areas has been a perennial issue, and being able to ensure that TAFE lecturers—it could be private registered training organisations as well, but for the purposes of today’s discussion, it is TAFE lecturers—have the right industry currency and skills and the qualifications that we expect lecturing staff maintain to ensure that they can impart their knowledge effectively as people with a certificate IV qualification in training and assessment. For instance, it could be in the member’s electorate in Esperance or in the great southern. It could also be in the Pilbara, where this is a real challenge. Having a mature relationship with industry so that we can properly meet their needs to not only train people to give them skilled workers, but also ensure that they are not poaching our skilled lecturers with higher wages can be a real challenge. I will hand over to Ms Ho to see whether she has anything else to add.

[9.50 am]

Ms K. Ho: The minister has covered that very well. There are some challenges in regional areas. We are getting some lecturers for some courses; it is not across the board. The barrier is not so much getting the certificate IV qualification; it is more the competition from adjacent industries that may be offering higher pay.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: I refer to the ongoing initiatives in the table under “Spending Changes” on page 376 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. What kind of career tester programs can be experienced in North Metropolitan TAFE? What are they supporting?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I might hand over to the assistant minister.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I thank the member for the question. North Metro TAFE has delivered an engaging and diverse program with career taster experiences for over 4 000 year 9 students since the program started. I have been on the ground chatting to the lecturers and heads of campuses involved, who have told me through personal anecdotes just how incredibly successful the career taster program is. It has certainly boosted the reputation and accessibility of TAFEs, particularly North Metro TAFE in part of its program. North Metro TAFE has been able to deliver programs in the career taster program to under-represented and disadvantaged schools and students. Some of those career taster programs and the number of experiences delivered include building and construction CTPs, of which North Metro delivered 10; 56 creative industry career taster programs in electricity, gas, water and waste supply, of which North Metro delivered 10; 24 programs in media, marketing and communications; and six programs in science and environment. There is a host of probably 20 other career taster programs that I have not touched on.

The students who have participated in these programs have learnt how to operate autonomous systems, undertake blood pressure and other introductory health checks and operate cameras while filming in the creative industries.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer once again to page 376, and the line item “Jobs and Skills Centres—Aboriginal Support” under the ongoing initiatives. I notice that funding will drop over three consecutive years from a total of \$1.2 million to half of that in 2027–28. Is there some explanation for that?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am happy to talk about that program but, as with any of these programs, we have announced them for a finite period. We will evaluate them and their contribution in terms of ongoing work. It was never expected that they would be put in place permanently; we never claimed that that would be the case. In fact, we announced that the enhanced jobs and skills centres program targeting Aboriginal engagement will be extended to 2028. That is the additional funding that the member referred to in the 2027–28 column. The centres have been very well received. There are a number of them. I have had a few visits to the North Metro TAFE jobs and skills centre, which has a particular Aboriginal focus. I saw some great engagement there and met some of the cohort of students who had done a Job Ready program in digital skills. I met a group of women who had gone through that. I think I answered a parliamentary question on it. Some of the women got work out of that but they really struggled to get their foot in the door to train let alone work. In that parliamentary question, I acknowledged some of the employers who have taken placements out of that particular Job Ready program, including the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, and have since employed people as a result of those Aboriginal students starting the Job Ready program. It is a six-week program, which has a TAFE component and a work placement component.

In 2023, the jobs and skills centres assisted over 4 000 clients who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. It is meant to be culturally safe for people, a place where Aboriginal people can feel confident that they can get some assistance. We have one in Fremantle that is targeting some of those students.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has merging the workforce development centres and the Aboriginal workforce development centres been a success?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is the member talking about the jobs and skills centres?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The evaluation of the jobs and skills centres is an ongoing piece of work. For the full calendar year of 2023—from 1 January to the end of the year—29 600 individual clients were assisted across all the jobs and skills centres in just under 60 000 interactions. As I said, just over 4 000 of those clients identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Importantly, 4 900 organisations were assisted. Having a connection with not only the individuals who seek advice, but also the employers who may want to employ people or link up with people to meet their skills needs, is an important part of the jobs and skills centres.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many Aboriginal people are employed in the jobs and skills centres?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will be happy to take that on notice as a supplementary. I do not have that figure to hand.

The CHAIR: Minister, could you clarify what you are going to provide?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will provide the number of people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander who are employed at jobs and skills centres in WA.

[Supplementary Information No B9.]

[10.00 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: I understood that the member was asking for the number of Aboriginal people employed —

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The number of Aboriginal people employed in jobs and skills centres.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Some of those centres are run by TAFEs and are employed by the state government and some are contracted to work, but we will endeavour to find that information for both.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I refer to the heading “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 377 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. What is the state government doing to ensure that a skilled workforce is available for the transition to clean energy?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am very happy to talk about this. This is a really important part of the work we are doing as a state government through the energy portfolio, as the member knows very well, to ensure that we have the skilled labour available throughout the width and length of the state to meet the variety of skills that will be required as we transition to clean energy.

First and foremost, we have sent a very clear signal to the labour market that we need people working in these areas by offering fee-free and low-cost training in priority industry areas, including clean energy. In the case of fee-free skill sets, for instance, a really important part of our transition to clean energy is not only people getting full qualifications in the related areas, but also those who have existing qualifications getting a post-trade qualification or even adding post-degree improvements to their skills. Skill sets are an important part of the mix. A number of these training courses are fee-free to upskill people for the jobs associated with clean energy, including ones relating to battery storage, standalone power systems and electrical and hybrid vehicles. The skill sets could relate to future battery and critical minerals, and electric and hybrid vehicles. Low-cost full qualifications are also available, including a certificate III in electrotechnology electrician, a certificate III in engineering—industrial electrician and a certificate III in automotive electrical technology. I do not know a clearer way that we can say to people that we want them to train in an area than giving them a completely free full qualification.

The jobs and skills centres we discussed earlier are an important pathway that we are using to send the message that we want to raise awareness of the career pathways for those industries and the resulting job opportunities. Long-term jobs in the regions and employment opportunities for people, including Aboriginal people, will be really important in the transition to clean energy. The assistant minister talked about the year 9 career taster program. That is another crucial way we are raising detailed awareness amongst kids in schools and their families about the future clean energy industry opportunities.

We have also put in a bid for the federal government’s proposed clean energy national centre of excellence to be established here in Western Australia. We think it is a very competitive bid. We are doing a lot of work to make sure that we explain the benefits of our proposal, which is the network of existing TAFE colleges that reflect the varied nature of the clean energy work that needs to be done, whether it is in the field of transmission, hydrogen, renewables or battery storage. Work has been done in existing TAFE colleges around the state and we are connecting with industry and understanding what its needs will be. A lot of work is being done to make sure that we have the capacity to do that within our TAFE colleges. We are liaising with private registered training organisations on the work they are doing in this area. We are liaising with industry to understand its needs and, importantly, sending a message to the WA public, including young workers, emerging workers and mature workers, that these are the jobs of the future for Western Australia.

The appropriation was recommended.

Building and Construction Industry Training Board —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms S.F. McGurk, Minister for Training and Workforce Development.

Ms T. Allen, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr L. Baptie, Business Services Manager.

Dr S. Gallacher, Chief of Staff, Minister for Training and Workforce Development.

[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. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point.

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.

I give the first question to the member for Cottesloe.

Dr D.J. HONEY: My first question is of a historic nature on this matter. I refer to page 396 of budget paper No 2 and page 126 of budget paper No 3. There is virtually no detail in there at all. It is a really lean description of what is going on compared with other areas. I wonder why more detail has not been provided to explain the operations of the board, such as the costs and the like.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It is an off-budget agency.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I know, but it could have some detail.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It is under the standing orders of the Parliament.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I will let the minister answer.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is good to have an experienced former minister over there to make the point that the Building and Construction Industry Training Board produces its own annual report with detailed financials that are available at any time. Of course, parliamentary questions asked throughout the year are also available. The Building and Construction Industry Training Board is a statutory authority. As members know, it is funded through a levy that is administered by the board. The board receives no appropriation from the consolidated account, which I think answers some of the questions the member has. Perhaps if he could outline some specific questions, it might be a bit easier to answer.

Dr D.J. HONEY: On page 126 of budget paper No 3, we can see that from 2023–24, as I understand it, \$37.2 million has been provided for a four-year apprentice support program. What is the participation rate for that scheme to date?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Can I please get a clarification on the reference?

[10.10 am]

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is page 126 of budget paper No 3.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am just trying to find the page.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is under the operational plan and new initiatives in budget paper No 3.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Okay. It is operating expenditure, and you are asking about —

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am asking about the \$37.2 million for the four-year apprentice support program, which I understand commenced in 2023–24.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, that is right. The whole support program and support payments have been put in place. It includes both the tool allowance and the apprentice completion grant. The estimated cost of that entire initiative is over \$37.2 million. The member asked for the number of apprentices the program has supported. I am sorry that I do not have that information. I have read it recently, but I do not have it in front of me. Sorry; in 2023–24, 1 122 apprentices received the completion bonus. As for how many have received the tool allowance, I would need to get that figure to the member.

Dr D.J. HONEY: That is fine. Have we seen an uptick in the number of apprentices in building trades; and, if so, what is the magnitude of that uptick?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, that is right. The building and construction industry fund probably does not relate specifically to an item in this fund. It does not fund all the apprentices. It funds only particular programs designed

to increase under its program. I just gave back my file for the Department of Training and Workforce Development to be placed elsewhere, but my recollection is that the number of apprentices and trainees in the building and construction industry has increased by just under 100 per cent compared with pre-pandemic levels. It has been a fantastic increase. A record number of apprentices and trainees are in the system at the moment across the board.

The construction training fund will focus on particular programs designed to support people in the industry. We have the group training organisation subsidy incentive in place, which has been very popular. There is an increase in funding to the base employer grant that is available. We have programs to support employers wanting to take on apprentices and trainees, particularly apprentices, in the construction industry. For instance, \$15.1 million in this budget was put in place for a 25 per cent increase in the base employer grant.

Dr D.J. HONEY: In relation to that increase in the base employer grant, we have seen a number of dramatic collapses of building companies. Are there adequate places for apprentices so that they can be placed in those programs, or are we struggling to find placements for the apprentices?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to Tiffany Allen to answer that question.

Ms T. Allen: Thank you. Yes, although there have been some insolvencies, there are new builders coming on board and they have an appetite for training because they are trying to look for a new workforce. We have not found any instances in which an apprentice has not been able to find an employer. It is sometimes the reverse.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Another part of that is the \$5 million increase to the capital grants program for registered training organisations. Is that program current or is it an entirely new program that will commence at the end of this financial year?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, this is a new program but it was announced previously. We have had the first round. This program is in partnership with industry to help address the current lack of physical premises for training capacity, which was impacting critical building and construction trades. The request was considered quite carefully by the board because it is not common for it to assist private training organisations, but it was acknowledged that they were having trouble with some of their facilities. This is the first time that this particular program has been put in place, but this is the second round that has been put out to offer for private registered training organisations.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of the Building and Construction Industry Training Board Authority.

WorkCover Western Australia Authority —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms S.F. McGurk, Minister for Industrial Relations.

Mr C. White, Chief Executive Officer, WorkCover WA.

Mr J. Hull, Chief Finance Officer, WorkCover WA.

Dr S. Gallacher, Chief of Staff, Minister for Industrial Relations.

[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. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point.

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.

I give the call to the member for Cottesloe.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much, chair. I refer to page 117 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the asset investment program table, which includes building maintenance, hardware and so on. The increase in the asset investment program is attributed to the replacement of the regulatory services management system in 2025–26 and 2026–27. I am intrigued; the system is described as being obsolete and I wonder: why is it not being replaced earlier, given the importance of those systems?

[10.20 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: I might hand over to Mr White to answer that question.

Mr C. White: The system is still perfectly functional. It is reaching its end of life, but it has been programmed to be replaced following the introduction of the new act. The new workers compensation act has been coming for a long time and will come into operation on 1 July. We felt it was too much of a shift for our systems to cope with a brand

new system for our regulatory services team and to cope with the changes that are incorporated in the new act. The intention is to look at a third-party system. This system is built in-house, and we have spent and continue to spend a lot of resources on ensuring cybersecurity for it and our other systems to achieve the essential eight requirements that are being implemented across government. It is a high priority, once we get to the other side of the new act, to do the evaluation and tender work to select a system for the long haul. The system dates from 2012.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The system is described as being obsolete. Does that mean that WorkCover will need some sort of workaround or other things until it gets the new system? Will it sort of restrict its ability to manage the new act or will it cope in other ways?

Mr C. White: No. The system is still perfectly functional, and we have a good, solid in-house team that maintains it. It is being updated at the moment, ready for the new system requirements that are associated with the new act. Obsolete might be too strong; it will be maintained over the next few years, and that is largely on the back of increased cybersecurity expectations. The skill sets required internally to ensure safe and secure systems are getting beyond the scope of an agency like ours, so the plan is to move to a third-party system that has those cybersecurity expectations baked in. That is the intention. I do not have any concerns about our ability to manage regulatory services cases in the next year or two.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have a new question related to budget paper No 3, page 103, and the updated financial estimates. The budget updated financial estimates for workers compensation are \$18.2 million for 2023–24 to 2027–28. The former minister and I spent some time in the chamber talking about all these changes. How many claims have we seen over the past year for uninsured employers?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you. I will ask Mr White to answer that question.

Mr C. White: This is something that we track very closely. The organisation, WorkCover, has a key performance indicator that expects about five uninsured claims a year. This year to date, we have had nine. Many are small in cost, but there have been one or two very large uninsured claims that the safety net the scheme provides is required to fund. They are baked into the actuarial estimates for the forward estimates. Our recent experience—not so much in the number of uninsured claims but in the cost of a small number of claims—has been that the cost is unusually high, and that has played out in the actuarial estimates going forward.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Could I ask a further question on that?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes; fire away!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Could the minister update us on the program of work of chasing down the uninsured employers?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you. I will ask Mr White to answer that.

Mr C. White: I mentioned that we have nine claims for which WorkCover is providing payments to injured workers, but there are 22 potentially uninsured claims. WorkCover spends a lot of resources to find an insurer if the employer is unaware that it is insured, but the workers compensation also provides that if the contract chain has a principal, the principal picks up the liability if the contractor is uninsured. WorkCover, historically, has been very successful in finding principals and, therefore, insurers that pick up the cost of the claim. The average payment out of the scheme is not high. We have to make provisions for it because if all those 22 claims were payable by the safety net, we would need to fund them. We have actuarial updates every 30 June to make sure that we are well provisioned for that. In most cases, we find an employer or a principal employer and, therefore, an insurer that is liable to make the payments. There have been one or two very large claims for which that has not been the case and the scheme has had to make the payments to the injured worker.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I appreciate that Mr White said there are a reasonable number of these. For those very large claims, was it that the employer had not followed the law and taken out insurance, or was it that the business had gone broke and was no longer existent to pay the claim?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you. I will get Mr White to answer that.

Mr C. White: In those cases, the employer did not have insurance. They were rather informal employers that perhaps were not aware of their obligations on many fronts, but there was an employment relationship and a very serious fall from height happened. The injured worker was a worker, the employer was an employer at law and, therefore, those obligations were there. That is something we see perhaps increasingly: employers are not fully aware of their obligations through informal arrangements. Sometimes family or friends are involved and work is done; it is actual work and paid work, but the protections are not in place.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to the money recouped. Mr White said WorkCover puts a lot of effort into making sure that people do somehow or other have to pay for their obligations. How much money was recouped by WorkCover over the last 12 months or financial year?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Can I just clarify? Is the member asking about the employers that are not insured?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes, I am asking about when WorkCover has pursued a negligent employer.

Mr C. White: That is a difficult question to answer because often we do not make the payment or it takes many years. When we do make the payment, it goes to the fines and recovery process for recompense, so it takes a long time to get those moneys back. We will have figures on how much income we received in 2024 or the year to date on those recoveries, but, unfortunately, it is not a very high proportion.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have a follow-up. Again, I refer to page 103 of budget paper No 3. Part of that \$18.2 million increase is attributed to in-house prosecution activities. Can the minister outline what prosecution activities have been undertaken to save time? What team does WorkCover have in-house for prosecutions?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will ask Mr White to answer that.

Mr C. White: Traditionally, WorkCover prosecutions have been done by the State Solicitor's Office, but in the last three years, through a memorandum of understanding with the Australian Taxation Office, WorkCover has obtained data on wages paid and pay-as-you-go taxation context for employers, which have greatly enhanced our ability to identify employers that look like they should have insurance but we cannot find them on our systems. That has been very successful. Elsewhere in the budget paper, it talks about additional revenue that we have obtained from fines and penalties through that process. We have substantially increased the number of prosecutions, to the extent that the SSO asked us to consider bringing that function in-house. Through a period of conversation with the SSO and training, we have trained one legally qualified in-house person, and we have recruited an ex-police prosecutor to undertake that function for us. From the Department of Justice, we obtained the relevant approvals to run the prosecution process ourselves, and that is going very smoothly. Over time, we expect that the number of those prosecutions will diminish. The power of the data-matching is so strong that we think in the next year or two—perhaps a little longer—it will be very hard to be an employer in Western Australia and not have insurance because we will see it within a few months on our systems. At least for the next year or two, we will need that prosecutorial function to be sustained.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much. Minister, in budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 176, just under the reference to the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act 2023 is an estimate that the premiums across the catastrophic injury support scheme will increase by 2.83 per cent. That will increase income by about an additional \$8.6 million in 2024–25. Can the minister outline how that was estimated and how that number was determined, please?

[10.30 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you, Mr White.

Mr C. White: As part of the development of a new workers compensation act, the ability for workers to access the Insurance Commission's catastrophic industry fund was built in and it was actuarially costed. The new act effectively positions WorkCover as a collector of a levy and the funds collected pass through WorkCover through our standard levy mechanisms. WorkCover is funded by levies on insurers. This is an additional levy that WorkCover will collect and remit directly to the Insurance Commission to cover the costs of catastrophically injured workers. For this year, insurers and self-insurers will be levied approximately \$27 million and their contributions will go to the Insurance Commission to manage those claims when they occur.

Dr D.J. HONEY: When we discussed this in Parliament with the former minister, that was a reassuringly low estimate for giving that important cover. It did not look like it was going to send business to the wall to cover it all. Are there any surprises, or does it look like those estimates have been pretty good?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Through Mr White, thank you.

Mr C. White: It is early days yet. Because the system has not commenced, we have had the benefit of other jurisdictions moving in the same way and it has been very varied. In some jurisdictions, quite a number of claims have found their way to their catastrophic schemes. In others, not so much. We think there will be a relatively small number of claims, and actuaries agree, simply because in Western Australian workers compensation schemes, severely injured workers can still sue at common law, receive large lump-sum payments and take care of their own care. This lifetime care is only for care, so an injured worker who meets the criteria will have all their standard workers compensation payments and can opt to go to the Insurance Commission for lifetime care for medical and other supports. Similarly, a worker can decide that they can manage their future and will take the lump sum associated with the cost of that care, and they will look after themselves. It will be very interesting to see over the next few years how many claims there are and what choices workers make and what legal advisers provide to them.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of the WorkCover WA.

Division 16: Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety — Services 2 to 4, Industrial Relations —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms S.F. McGurk, Minister for Industrial Relations.

Mr R. Sellers, Director General.

Mr I. Munns, Deputy Director General.

Mr. J. Kwong, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms S. North, Acting WorkSafe Commissioner.

Ms L. Field, Executive Director, Private Sector Labour Relations.

Mr A. Lyon, Executive Director, Government Sector Labour Relations.

Dr S. Gallacher, Chief of Staff, Minister for Industrial Relations.

[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.

I give the call to the member for Cottesloe.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 235 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the seventh significant issue, which outlines that the government has announced a new principles-based wages policy and that a number of agreements are due to expire. Does the minister have a funding envelope that has been developed for each enterprise bargaining agreement as part of those negotiation processes? If that is the case, is the minister able to disclose that funding envelope?

Ms S.F. McGURK: First of all, the new public sector wages policy was announced in December last year. As the member said, it is shifting to a principles-based wages policy that will require great oversight and governance to ensure financial and industrial provision and produce outcomes that are industrially sound but, at the same time, financially sustainable. Premier's Circular 2023-03, *Government labour relations management framework*, sets out the authorising environment for the negotiations. As the member would be aware, the bargaining requires allocation of adequate resources to ensure that necessary approvals are sought in a timely manner.

I understand that the Treasurer provided responses to these questions yesterday. As would be prudent of me, I will endorse her position that the global provision is required for budgeting purposes. There is no specific dollar allocation for any one agreement or occupational group. Each agreement is negotiated within its own context, both for wages and conditions. Agreements will expire at different times across the forward estimates and agency budget increases also include FTE changes across the forward estimates. These all need to be taken into account in negotiations, and I am looking forward to doing so over the next 12 months!

Dr D.J. HONEY: More fun than estimates!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: For the benefit of *Hansard*, there was a smile on the minister's face.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is there a global percentage target for wage increases, or is that variable?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, there is not. As I said, we will bargain in good faith with each union and agency where their members are employed. The negotiations will involve a number of issues, including wages or salary outcomes and also conditions that might apply or other supports that might be given. The two negotiations that have progressed so far—with the Rail Tram and Bus Union for public transit officers and the State School Teachers' Union of WA for public sector teachers—have reflected a mix of all those areas.

[10.40 am]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to paragraph 12 at the top of page 236 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the mine statutory positions prescribed in work health and safety laws. A number of people have contacted my office. There are some global questions on this matter and the extension that has been provided. Clearly, there had not been enough thought put into how complex this system will be or how many people will need to be put through it, so government has been forced to push it out for 12 months, as far as I can see. But I have grave concerns, even with the 12-month extension, about the impacts on people who operate gravel pits—local governments, for example. I would like the minister's reflection on how these provisions will impact those particular contractors, and the complexity of what they are being asked to do in order to undertake a very simple task. Does the minister have any reflections on the rollout so far, which I would say has been disastrous, and what needs to be done to get it back on track so that we are not in this position 12 months down the track?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We make no apology as a government for putting in place high standards for workers' health and safety throughout all the varying workplaces, but particularly in mines. Mining has traditionally been an area that has experienced high rates of injury and, in fact, fatalities. It has needed a lot of work. To their credit, employers in the sector have acknowledged that their standards needed to be raised and that they needed to put concerted effort into understanding particular hazards and responding to and minimising any health and safety risks. I acknowledge the work that has been done by the industry and by others in government specialist agencies.

Statutory position holders in WA mine sites were previously certified under the Mines Safety and Inspection Act 1994. They were required to transition to a certified equivalent role under the Work Health and Safety Act 2020 within three years of the commencement of that act. As the member mentioned, as part of the certification requirements, examinations are facilitated by the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety for new applicants and transitioning position holders, and demand for these examinations has been high. It reflects the number of people working in the industry, the geographical reach of the industry, and also the varying components of the industry, as the member mentioned about her electorate. The transition period has been extended for a further 12 months, as the member mentioned, to 30 March 2026, and it is expected that the extension will alleviate pressure on candidates to transition to the requirements under the new act. I am getting regular reports on how we are progressing and the program of work that will need to be undertaken to ensure that we can meet that revised timeframe.

As I said, we make no apology for expecting that the people who oversee work in a managerial or supervisory position have a good, practical understanding of their obligations under the act, and that is what this certification is about.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: How many applicants have undertaken the examination to date? How many people have gone through the process?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to the acting WorkSafe WA Commissioner.

Ms S. North: Thank you, minister. To date, 2 413 people have taken the exam.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: How many of those people have had to take it more than once?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We do not have that information here. I think it is envisaged that people will be able to take the exam three times. They would be given an opportunity to resit the exam within a 12-month period.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am advised that a high number of people are having to go through the process more than once. It is not a simple or easy process. I take the minister's point about safety issues and the importance of making sure that everyone who goes to work comes home at the end of the day. Does the minister have an understanding of how many people are still required to undertake the examination? When the minister put this legislation into place, what were the anticipated global figures of the number of people who will need to go through this process?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to the acting WorkSafe WA Commissioner, but I am advised that the pass rate for these exams so far has been 84 per cent, so it is high. We understand that there are people working in these industries who do not often sit exams, so we have tried to make the assessment process as accessible as possible, while at the same time maintaining the integrity of the system. We want people to have a good and practical understanding of the hazards that workers in their area of responsibility are possibly exposed to in their workplaces and how to ensure that those workers are safe. But I will hand over to the acting WorkSafe WA Commissioner to answer that question.

Ms S. North: Our current estimate is that a total of 25 000 candidates will need to sit these exams. It is not a precise figure because some factors are industry led. For example, if industry is operating with multiple people in the same role for shift arrangements or similar, that would be an additional person. Taking that into account, along with the information that we have from industry and the estimated pass rate, we have reached that estimation.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: To date, 2 413 people have taken the exam. The global figure is 25 000. Are we sitting exams 24 hours a day for the next 12 months to get those people through before the legislation actually comes into play?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, we are not. We have made sure that additional places are available—physical places and locations—to make sure that the exams can be taken around the state in a secure way that, as I said, maintains the integrity of the assessment. I will hand over to Ms North to make any other comments on how we will meet these requirements under the act.

Ms S. North: As the minister has advised, we have recently increased the number of venues at which exams can be taken, and with the increased number of venues, we are able to run more than one exam session a day. As such, I am advised that those current centres have the capacity to sit 44 000 applicants over the time that we have in the transitional arrangements.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have just done a quick calculation. If we had a full calendar year of workdays, that would be 220 days, and there are 21 000 tests to do.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: No, there are 261.

Dr D.J. HONEY: There are 220 workdays in a year.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: No.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes, I know. I am taking out all the public holidays.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: No.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am not going to have a debate with the member; I will put the question through the minister. There are 220 workdays in the year and there are 21 000 tests to be done.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: There are 261.

The CHAIR: Member!

Dr D.J. HONEY: That is 95 tests each business working day. In fact, obviously, given that there is less than a calendar year left, it will be higher than that. Is the capacity for the number of tests able to be taken on a business working day greater than that, in order to achieve that goal? It seems like a huge target.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I know that the member was probably getting excited about calculating the number of business days and how many tests could be run, but I do not know whether he was listening to what the acting commissioner said. She said that we have arranged additional capacity around the state to ensure different locations so that 44 000 tests could be done before the completion date. That is the calculation that has been done. We are working hard with not only individual companies, but also importantly the peak bodies to ensure that employers understand their obligations under the act. The act was developed with a lot of consultation with industry. Industry itself expects high standards and has welcomed the attention and resources that the state government has put in place to assist it with that. I think the exam process for the statutory holders' obligations will enhance safety in workplaces, and that is something that the WA community rightly expects.

[10.50 am]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Could I have a list of those locations?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: And could the minister tell me now whether there are any in the electorate of Central Wheatbelt?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There are three exam centres in Cannington, one in Kalgoorlie, one in Bunbury and one in North Lake. These are the exam centres from May this year to March 2026. They have a maximum capacity per exam event et cetera, which brings us to the calculation that over 44 000 people could be accommodated in all those centres.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Do these exams have to be sat in person?

Ms S.F. McGURK: At this stage, that is correct.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I did not hear that there is any for the north of the state. Would that be correct?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The capacity outside the centres I have discussed is still being worked through. One of the issues is making sure that the exams are taken in secure locations. That has been a challenge for the team. At the moment, as we heard from the number of people who have gone through those exams, it is certainly the case that people in the mining industry throughout the state are used to attending regional centres as well as the metropolitan area to do this sort of work.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: This is the last question, minister, because I will follow it up outside estimates—sorry; I have two. What is the timeline for putting in place additional locations? Has that been allowed for in terms of resourcing within the current budget?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to the acting commissioner to answer that question, but I want to reiterate the restrictions we have on finding other locations. Training facilities might be available in some regional areas, but they are usually occupied, so it is not easy to be able to use them. I will hand over to the acting WorkSafe Western Australia Commissioner to answer that question.

Ms S. North: We are continuing to examine further venues. There are requirements for the venues from both an IT systems and security aspect, as well as the point of view of invigilation, as we have to make sure that we have an invigilator on site. However, we do have a project team in place. The 44 000 is without those additional venues.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Are people able to take the tests seven days a week or are they limited to business days?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is business days at this stage. As I said, the group within WorkSafe that is overseeing the implementation of this has been working with industry to understand its requirements and ensure that anyone who needs to do this work has adequate options to ensure that they can sit the exam.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Just so I am clear, this applies equally to someone running a gravel pit, for instance, in the wheatbelt or a sand extraction pit for road base—a local government or a local contractor—all the way through

to BHP, Rio Tinto and FMG running big holes in the ground or underground mining facilities. I understand that they all have that requirement. The concern, from my perspective, comes from the risk factor, which would not be quite the same for someone who is pushing a bit of gravel around at the back of the wheatbelt as someone who is operating a multi-person mine or underground mine elsewhere in the state. However, the requirement for that test is the same, and there is nowhere for them to do it locally.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Exceptions for small organisations apply under the act. I will hand over to Ms North to give a bit more detail about how they are accommodated.

Ms S. North: Yes, there are some exceptions. Firstly, they would need to be covered by the mining legislation. There are some uses of gravel, for example, that are not covered under the mines part of the work health and safety legislation. Additionally, there are exceptions for small businesses that are not required to pay the mines safety levy.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you. I will follow it up.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I go to paragraph 11 of the significant issues impacting the agency on page 235 of volume 1 of budget paper No 2. How many reports of sexual harassment and assaults in the mining industry have there been since the establishment of the Speak Up, Report It campaign?

Ms S.F. McGURK: As the minister responsible for industrial relations in the state government, I would not be privy to all reports that are made to police or internally within a workplace. Did the member ask about sexual harassment?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes—the matters that have been reported to the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety since the Speak Up campaign commenced.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Reported to WorkSafe?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will talk more generally about the work that we have been doing before I hand over to the acting commissioner to see whether specific data on sexual harassment claims is kept within a certain window or time period and whether that category is kept within the data of WorkSafe. I can say, particularly through my observation of this topic and also my previous ministerial responsibilities as the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, that the work we are doing may not result in direct reporting to WorkSafe. It may mean that there is increased awareness amongst both female employees and the workforce in general about what constitutes sexual harassment or inappropriate behaviour at a workplace level. It might also increase awareness amongst people who might be perpetrators of that sort of behaviour that their behaviour is inappropriate at the workplace. I will stop to ask whether that information is collected at WorkSafe and whether we can give it to the member. The program of work that began with increased disclosures, particularly at fly-in fly-out camps in the mining industry, goes to the increased awareness that this sort of behaviour is not only unacceptable but, in some cases, illegal. The program of work will be ongoing to raise awareness and ensure we have adequate responses at workplaces as well as at a regulatory level. I will check with the acting WorkSafe Commissioner to see whether we collect that sort of data. I will hand over to her to answer the question as well.

[11.00 am]

[Mrs M.R. Marshall took the chair.]

Ms S. North: Thank you, minister and through the chair. We have that type of information, although I do not have it with me. What I recall from having looked at the data is we have had a relatively small number of inquiries by phone and a few more via email. A large number of people accessed our new online tool that provides people direction and resources around what different information and agencies work in the area of sexual harassment and where people might want to go to seek more information. Since that tool came online this financial year, at least a few thousand people have accessed it.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I wonder whether the minister would be able to provide that information as supplementary information—that is, the number of reports to WorkSafe of sexual harassment and assaults in the mining industry?

Ms S.F. McGURK: What date is that from?

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is since the Speak Up campaign commenced.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, we can take that as supplementary.

The CHAIR: Does the minister agree to provide the supplementary information; and, if so, can you please state exactly what information will be provided?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The member just outlined it, so it is probably adequately captured in *Hansard*. It is the number of formal complaints of sexual harassment that have been made to WorkSafe since the commencement of the Speak Up campaign to date.

[*Supplementary Information No B10.*]

Dr D.J. HONEY: I know some people may not have been surprised, but I think a lot of people were genuinely shocked to realise the horrific extent of sexual harassment and assault in the mining industry generally. There

is the old metric of what you don't measure, you don't improve. If WorkSafe is not collecting this information, is the minister able to tell me whether some other department, such as the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, is collating the information from the mining industry to determine the trajectory of this problem? If not, is that a worthy goal?

Ms S.F. McGURK: First of all, we have indicated it is collecting information on formal complaints that are made and we will get it to the member.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Secondly, the Mental Awareness, Respect and Safety program that commenced under my predecessor as Minister for Industrial Relations is doing some quite important work in analysing how the industry is progressing, raising awareness and responding to these issues in the industry. That is being assisted by work being undertaken by the Centre for Transformative Work Design at Curtin University. It is conducting a number of studies to benchmark attitudes to some of these issues in the industry.

I do not know where the member has been if he was surprised by some of the attitudes and the extent of unwanted activity in the mining industry. Women have been talking about this in a number of industries and workplaces for many years. Whether violence takes place in the home or in the workplace, it is equally unacceptable, but it is something that this government has taken very seriously since coming to office in 2017. These unacceptable attitudes and behaviours towards women are not confined to the mining industry but they have certain characteristics in the mining industry and male-dominated industries such as construction. The hospitality and media and communications industries are other areas that the federal regulators discussed with me. These are industries in which women experience unwanted attention, inappropriate behaviours, harassment or worse. Each of these industries has its own characteristics and cultures they need to combat and we are committed to doing that—for instance, through the MARS program in the mining industry. As I said, many industries have cultures that are unacceptable and challenging towards women, whether it is the Parliaments of this country or the mining industry. We need to combat those through increased awareness.

Dr D.J. HONEY: What funding has been allocated by WorkSafe to address this issue?

Ms S.F. McGURK: In this budget, the state government has committed a further \$6.5 million to continue delivering the MARS program in 2024–25. That is in particular for the MARS program. As I spoke of before, an awareness about the right for women to be safe in their workplace, whether it is from physical hazards or so-called psychosocial hazards, is something that the government continues through a program of work. In fact, there has been a national discussion around safety for women at work, at home and in our community.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Are there any specific staff allocations to this issue or particular management roles that are focusing on it, given, as the minister indicated, it is a pervasive problem?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to the acting WorkSafe Commissioner to answer what specific resources are being allocated within WorkSafe. Through the MARS program, for example, we are seeing specific allocation of funding to studies and resources that are available for the industry. These work in conjunction with individual companies and peak bodies such as the Chamber of Minerals and Energy to raise awareness within the sector and ensure our responses, within government and within the sector, are fit for purpose and will be effective on the ground. I acknowledge the human resources and funding provided by peak bodies and individual companies. I will hand over to Ms North.

[11.10 am]

Ms S. North: In addition to the significant mental awareness, respect and safety program and its budget item, which have been mentioned, WorkSafe has a number of specialist inspector roles—around 16—across general industries, mining and petroleum. They conduct compliance work in psychosocial hazards broadly and are not restricted to sexual harassment, but it is also included. Additionally, psychosocial hazards are recognised in WorkSafe's strategic plan as one of our priority areas. As such, they are integrated into our business's usual activities, such as the information that is put forward, educational work and other forms of communication. Additionally, through the MARS program, a large summit was held last August specifically on sexual harassment in the resources sector.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 235, budget paper No 2, volume 1, the eighth significant issue. I congratulate the government on its ban on the use of engineered stone in Western Australian businesses. The former minister and I had discussions on the WorkSafe legislation. Industry is generally way too relaxed about the hazards of all dust, but obviously crystalline silica is horrendous in the immediacy of its impact. I have a couple of questions. Has the implementation of the ban been effective and resulted in the cessation of the use of engineered stone? Can the minister talk about compliance checking?

Ms S.F. McGURK: In December last year, the state government joined with other Australian jurisdictions to prohibit the use of engineered stone, as the member mentioned, and to strengthen the regulations for those who have been exposed to silica in industries in Australia. This is due to the unacceptable health risks posed by exposure to crystalline silica. Most jurisdictions, including WA, agreed to commence the stone prohibition from 1 July this year. The

prohibition applies to engineered stone benchtops, panels and slabs containing more than one per cent crystalline silica. Under transitional arrangements, engineered stonework carried out between 1 July and 31 December 2024 will be exempt from the prohibition—this is the important condition—if contracts for that stonework were entered into on or before 21 December 2023. If contracts were entered into before the end of last year, people have the ability to continue their work to the end of this calendar year. This is an important part of the phase-out, if you like, because it will ensure that people who have already entered into contracts are not disadvantaged.

As the member for Cottesloe touched on during his question, crystalline silica processes for materials containing at least one per cent of silica will be subject to stronger regulations across all industries from 1 September this year. Importantly, of the 56 silicosis cases identified in this state since 2018, 50 have related to engineered stone. WorkSafe inspections of engineered stone manufacturers and installers continue to find high rates of noncompliance with health and safety laws in that industry. Importantly for the public, all sorts of finished engineered stone products, such as sinks, panelling and the like, which are very common, that do not require processing will not be prohibited because, of course, they are in situ; they are not broken, and they are not being worked. Businesses planning to undertake work with legacy engineered stone will be required to notify regulators. The disposal of engineered stone will follow existing jurisdictional waste management processes. I will hand over to Ms North, who will talk about what sort of work the regulator is doing in this area.

Ms S. North: A lot of nationally harmonised work is going on; indeed, we are talking to our colleagues and counterparts in other jurisdictions as we move towards bringing in legislation. It is our expectation that it will be consistent across Australia, other than some potential differences in the transitional arrangements.

There will be a need for WorkSafe to undertake compliance checks, particularly on products that are advertised as low-silica products and therefore compliant. Such products are entering the market, and part of our business plan for the upcoming year is to do various checks. That might entail finding out what information importers—these products tend to be imported—have on these products and undertaking our own testing. We will also liaise with our colleagues at the commonwealth level about the requirements on products at the point of import.

Dr D.J. HONEY: With the importation, is almost like ethically sourced coffee. I do not know about the minister, but my Facebook feeds are the engineering, technical gadgets ones. They horrify me because they are typically from developing nations where there is no safety or occupational hygiene in the places at which a lot of these things are used and manufactured.

If inspections are not carried out, we know that cowboys and cowgirls will break the law for convenience. What increase in inspection resources will be applied in the compliance regime to ensure the proper enforcement of this ban?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I should acknowledge the work that WorkSafe has already done in this area, some of which was led by the acting commissioner. It has been very proactive. During a major project conducted between 2018 and 2021, more than 1 000 compliance notices were issued. As I understand it, WA was on the front foot. People started to identify this as an issue in the working of engineered stone but, as we said, it is ubiquitous. It is such a commonplace product. WorkSafe did a lot of work in issuing compliance notices. I can confirm that the federal government has indicated its work to ban the importation of engineered stone containing silica, and there has been discussion amongst ministers and the federal minister about ensuring that checks are in place. People can brand something a certain way but that does not necessarily mean that what it contains complies with the branding. There is a lot of awareness around that and the risks.

The acting commissioner outlined the work done by WorkSafe. It held three information sessions for peak bodies and government stakeholders in April and one online session for the broader community in May this year. WorkSafe employs occupational hygienists and physicians to conduct compliance work and review health monitoring information. In April this year, WorkSafe held an education forum for registered medical practitioners. These forums are usually held annually, but WorkSafe will be more proactive around that awareness for doctors. Last October, WorkSafe held an in-person Breathe Easy occupational health and hygiene forum, providing stakeholders with education material on respiratory hazards, including silica. WorkSafe has already been very active in this area. We will continue to ensure that we are sending a very clear message to people working in this industry that we take this hazard seriously.

[11.20 am]

Dr D.J. HONEY: In relation to the impact we have seen on the building industry, when the ban was first announced, the world was going to end. I appreciate that the government has made an allowance to enable approved projects to continue using the material. Have we seen industry adjust well to this or is it causing ongoing problems with industry?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not have it with me, but I have received advocacy from the Housing Industry Association. Some of the association's members, along with representatives of the HIA, came to see me about the ban. I outlined that the ban was announced in December 2023. I think it was announced at one of the first meetings I went to after being sworn in as the Minister for Industrial Relations. There was some advocacy by the HIA on behalf of its members. I met with them and listened to their advocacy. I also met with a couple of builders who were affected

by this decision. From the HIA's perspective, the feedback I got afterwards was that it appreciated the grandfather clause, for want of a better expression, to allow contracts entered into before the decision was made, so from the end of the last calendar year, so they could be worked through the system. Knowing that this is a national decision —

Dr D.J. HONEY: It makes it easier.

Ms S.F. McGURK: — gave some comfort, yes, because people were moving forward and finding alternative products, making sure that we were not unnecessarily impacting the housing supply and building works on the ground. That was an important consideration for us as a government.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I again refer to page 235 of budget paper No 2, in particular, significant issue 9, which states —

The Inquiry into the Agricultural Industry in Western Australia report and the WorkSafe Commissioner's response were published in April 2023.

What funding has been provided and what programs have been implemented as a result of the recommendations within that report?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am very happy to speak on this area —

Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE: There's our Dorothy Dixler!

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is an important issue.

Ms S.F. McGURK: — because it is important. We were talking earlier about the impact of increased regulation or attention on small and medium-sized businesses—for instance, in the member for Central Wheatbelt's electorate. There are challenges for small and medium-sized businesses in understanding regulations—in this case, health and safety—but it is also very important because they are busy doing the work; they are busy on the job. It is really important to make sure that they are aware of hazards—in this case, in the agricultural industry.

Farms are unique workplaces. There is a combination of hazards. The nature of the work makes agriculture one of the most dangerous sectors in which to work. The agriculture, forestry and fishing industries have the highest number of work-related fatalities. During the period 2012–13 to 2021–22, 46 fatalities were reported. That is the data we have to date. That is a high number for a nine-year period. In fact, 85 per cent of those fatalities occurred in the agricultural subdivision. There is still a lot of work to be done in this area.

As of 23 June 2022, following the 12 fatalities in the WA agricultural sector in the preceding 12 months, the previous WorkSafe WA Commissioner, Darren Kavanagh, initiated an independent inquiry into the industry in Western Australia using his powers under the Work Health and Safety Act 2020. The inquiry was conducted by an independent inquirer, Ms Pam Scott, a former Chief Commissioner of the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission. The report was released on 18 April last year. A two-year period of action initiated in response to the recommendations was proposed. I will quickly outline some of those recommendations. It recommended that a working group be set up to progress agricultural safety initiatives to deliver improved health and safety outcomes in the agricultural industry. The work established six dedicated specialist agricultural inspectors to increase the number of proactive and reactive compliance inspections, specifically answering the member's question. It also recommended that information and education resources suited to the agricultural sector be increased. These resources include a guide on fatalities in agriculture, *First steps to farm safety*; a monthly article in the *Farm Weekly* magazine by the acting WorkSafe WA Commissioner; and attendance by WorkSafe inspectors at several agricultural shows. For instance, WorkSafe will be attending the Mingenew Midwest Expo in August this year, the Dowerin Machinery Field Days in August and the Newdegate Machinery Field Days in September to promote health and safety and provide practical advice to farmers.

I could go on, but it is important work that the state government is focused on. If members think, for instance, not only of the awareness of locals working in the sector, but also young workers—perhaps migrant workers or people on holiday visas—working in the sector, we really need to focus on specific hazards and how to combat them.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister probably knows that I grew up on a farm. It is only God's good grace that I am alive. I mean that. It is an extremely hazardous work environment. I note that there was a lot of railing against it amongst some farmers but I note that the industry organisations—the Western Australian Farmers Federation and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association—were very supportive of the government making that move.

Does the minister have an idea of how many of the recommendations in that report that was published in April last year were implemented and how many are still to be implemented?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have outlined some of the activities. I do not have a summary of the recommendations and their implementation here today, but I will take the opportunity to say that in relation to the six agricultural inspectors that WorkSafe has established to conduct compliance work, there is a senior level 6 inspector and two level 5 inspectors—both permanent positions. Three new level 5 agricultural inspectors have been recruited on a temporary basis until June next year, and they are undertaking training. Quite a bit of work is being done within WorkSafe, but I do not have a list of the recommendations that have been implemented.

Dr D.J. HONEY: In relation to that, I went onto a farm around Williams a little while ago and I was required to do an induction before I was allowed onto the property, which was a good recognition of that report. Can the minister please provide by way of supplementary information the degree of implementation of those recommendations?

[11.30 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, I am happy to provide a list of the recommendations of the safety *Inquiry into agricultural industry in Western Australia*, undertaken by the WorkSafe Western Australia Commissioner, Darren Kavanagh, and include the progress of their implementation.

[*Supplementary Information No B11.*]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: How many inspections have been conducted? I presume that data is collected. Is it published and is the minister able to share that information?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to the acting WorkSafe Commissioner, but we might need to know a period of time and the industry. Is the member talking about the agricultural industry?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, my questions are with reference to the agricultural industry and the new inspectors that have been appointed.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Within a calendar year?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Since the inspectors have been appointed, how many inspections have been conducted?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to the acting commissioner, Ms North.

Ms S. North: Thank you, minister. We have not brought information today on how many agricultural inspections have been done. Initially, a lot of training of the new inspectors has been going on, which is normal for new inspectors. There is significant training process when they come on board. We would also have to make sure that we are clear on whether the data is for either the entirety of the agricultural sector or subsectors. Part of the issue with the agricultural sector is the breadth of it.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That goes to my next question: are there focus areas within the agricultural sector? The agricultural region was mentioned at the beginning. I presume that is a reference to broadacre farming, but I suggest there are also risks in intensive farming, the horticultural industry and abattoirs and places like that. Is there a program or a focus area for the forward estimates period that the minister can share with us?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to the acting commissioner.

Ms S. North: Yes, there is a compliance plan, going forward. That will focus more so on the broadacre farming sector, given that our statistics show that is where the serious and fatal incidents have occurred, historically. I note that we have also done some work on providing information for the horticultural industry in particular. That industry has had some serious incidents. I also note that WorkSafe convened a committee that reports to the Work Health and Safety Commission and includes peak bodies from different types of agricultural organisations. We are working with those peak bodies and stakeholders to see what other needs may arise or what other communications opportunities come through for the broader sector.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Could I perhaps flag a five-minute break at a convenient point?

The CHAIR: If everyone is happy to take a five-minute comfort break, the committee will now take a short break.

Meeting suspended from 11.33 to 11.42 am

The CHAIR: We will resume dealing with division 16, services 2 to 4, Industrial Relations. The next question is from the member for Cannington.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I refer to paragraph 11 on page 235. I know that the Mental Awareness, Respect and Safety program is in respect of sexual harassment, and bullying more generally, in the mining industry, but I make the observation that it is not just the mining industry that we need to have attention on, and I wonder whether the minister could help me. I understand section 19(2) of the act means that the health and safety regulations apply to not only employees of a business, but also other people. For example, would a media business have to have a policy to deal with a journalist bullying a journalist from a different company? If the employee is bullying a person in a workplace other than their own, is that something that the commissioner would be able to take action about? What about if the bullying of a journalist was occurring because it was by an elected official in local government? Let me make clear that, first, it is not in the workplace because it is through using a telephone, and second, it is not a co-employee of the business, but rather a media person bullying somebody in a different media organisation, or a local government–elected official bullying a person in a media organisation. Are those the sort of things that the commissioner could take action on and what sort of action could the commissioner envisage?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not know whether the member has a particular instance in mind that he is thinking of.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I might.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Our message is that people have a right to be safe in their workplace. In fact, the conversation we were having before is that women have the right to be safe in their home and community as well. Certainly, in the context of this discussion, people have a right to be safe in their workplace. We are talking here about bullying from other workers, their employer or people they come in contact with in the course of their work, whether it is direct, over the telephone or through other mediums. That is the context that the member is talking about here. I will hand over to the acting commissioner to talk about what remedies or opportunities there are for people to access support through WorkSafe.

The CHAIR: Ms North.

Ms S. North: Thank you, minister. There are several duties that would be relevant here. Firstly, if a person is in their work context and their behaviour could be harmful to others, workers have a duty to take reasonable care that their own conduct in the course of work is not putting others at risk. We could consider that duty when looking at specific circumstances if matters are raised with us. The other is from a systems-of-work consideration. Our primary duties of care under section 19 of the act are looking at what can be done so far as is reasonably practicable. The considerations that we would have to take into account include things like the seriousness and, from a practical point of view, the practicable means that we would expect the employer or the person conducting the business or undertaking to reasonably undertake.

The member's question sounds like it entailed some complicated situations, but there are certainly things that could be raised with WorkSafe, the circumstances looked at, and those relevant duties could be considered to see whether the duty holders have indeed meet those duties.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The person conducting a business or undertaking who employs the journalists, or the local government that the person is elected to, nonetheless has obligations to the journalist who does not work for that organisation. The PCBU notwithstanding, when the bullying is done by the individual, it is still potentially liable for those bullying activities. Could WorkSafe take action because it would expect the media organisation or local government to have systems in place to prevent bullying of third parties?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right. I am sure the acting commissioner could speak to this with a lot of experience. It is not only about how the employer responds once it might become aware of an incident or pattern of behaviour occurring, but also that it has systems in place, is proactive about raising awareness and has a complaints process for people both within the organisation and externally to raise those issues. That is really the breadth of the work that we are undertaking as we have more awareness around bullying, unacceptable behaviour, so-called psychosocial hazards in the workplace and also, as we were talking about before, in some cases, the attitude towards women.

A lot of work still needs to be done for people to really understand that some of their behaviours are just not acceptable. They are not acceptable at the workplace, when someone holds office or when a person feels that someone's behaviour might have provoked an angry response. People have a right to be safe in their workplace.

The CHAIR: Are there any new questions on division 16, services 2 to 4? No. I will put that to the committee.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 10: Registrar, Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission —

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 41: Water and Environmental Regulation — Services 1 to 3 and 5, Water —

Mrs M.R. Marshall, Chair.

Ms S.F. McGurk, Minister for Water.

Mr A. Jones, Director General.

Ms E. Briggs, Deputy Director General, Climate Change and Sustainability.

Mr C. Shaw, Deputy Director General, Approvals.

Mr D. O'Reilly, Deputy Director General, Strategy and Performance.

Ms H. Manderson, Chief Finance Officer.

Dr S. Gallacher, Chief of Staff, Minister for Water.

[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 these 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.

Are there any questions?

Dr D.J. HONEY: There certainly are, chair!

The CHAIR: The member for Cottesloe.

Dr D.J. HONEY: If we could kick off with spending changes on page 673 of budget paper No 2, a line item in the spending changes table, almost halfway down, refers to compliance resourcing, with around \$5 million this year. Hence, in terms of compliance, we note that it is associated with and refers to that. Could the minister please outline the purpose of that initiative?

[11.50 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: I can. Ensuring compliance with the state's environmental and water resource legislation is fundamental to enabling community as well as investor confidence in our regulatory framework. It is also fundamental to implementing streamlining and other bureaucratic reduction reforms. The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation is managing an increasing number of complex, high-profile and contentious compliance issues of state significance that have the potential to cause impacts to several environmental factors and pose a risk to several sensitive environments, water resources and public health. Cost-recovery funds from compliance and enforcement activities will be utilised by the department in a net-debt-neutral approach to deliver an additional 12 FTE and associated operational expenditure for compliance activities. The department is focused on increasing the capability and effectiveness of compliance and emergency response activities. These additional resources will allow a more proactive approach to the important tasks of dealing with unlawful environmental and water impacts, as well as impacts to the community. Additional resources will also allow post-approval assessments such as management plans to be prioritised, ensuring that projects can begin operating in a timely manner.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is my understanding of the minister's response clear? This is about inspectors physically going out to industry, the community or wherever to ensure that people are complying with water regulations. Did I understand that part of the increase in FTE was also about working out ways of simplifying the regulatory compliance burden, if you like, for industry and the like?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will see whether there is an agency response that Chris Shaw wants to talk about. I found a bit more detail here. The member asked about the \$13.8 million. There is \$8.3 million for 12 permanent compliance and enforcement FTEs, and \$2.4 million for the operation and maintenance of existing compliance technology. As I said, I referred to the post-approval assessments as well, but I will hand over to Chris Shaw to see whether he wants to add anything.

Mr C. Shaw: Thank you for the question, member. Yes, there are definitely elements of making our processes simpler. As the minister said, we are particularly looking at our post-approval area; once a project has its major approval, the proponents might have to do things like management plans to address particular key risks. The compliance and assurance area does the work around that with those proponents to ensure that they can be out there doing their projects effectively.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 673 of budget paper No 2 and the line "Understanding How Climate Change Impacts on Western Australia's Water Resources" under spending changes. I wonder what the requirement is there. Obviously, the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation has an excellent record, I think, in understanding water-use needs and the appropriate place to get water. I wonder what additional activity this role will carry out.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you. There has been a lot of discussion and awareness about this matter, particularly over the last couple of months, as we started to experience a warmer future for our state and a further drying of the south west of the state, as climate scientists predicted we might. The out-of-season weather and bushfires in November last year and WA just having had its warmest summer on record are stark reminders that we are experiencing the acute effects of climate change right now, and the impacts to water resources are likely to be widespread and profound. This new communication and research initiative will deliver sought-after guidance on how to apply climate projections for the water sector, and it was established in collaboration with several climate and water research organisations across the country.

Investment in the initiatives over the forward estimates will improve the base knowledge of climate change impacts on our state's water systems and will equip the water sector with consistent and user-friendly guidance and messaging so it can adapt to climate change impacts at the required pace and with reduced costs. In 2024–25, the initiative's team will publish the first comprehensive document on WA's climate and water resources, produce real-world examples of how to use our climate projections and deliver a simple data-access hub to enable diverse users to efficiently access the current recommended climate projections. These will be available in a website that will be a one-stop shop for useful guidance and tools.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Minister, what physically will this be? Will we contribute to those other research organisations? Will we have a body or bodies on the ground that work in this area within the department? Will we be funding research at universities? It is not sheep stations, but it is part of a sheep station!

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to Emily from the department to talk about this. In fact, I think I indicated when I was answering this that resources will be developed by the department and made available for Western Australians—people working both within the industry sector and in associated areas such as research, various aspects of industry or the environment—to access some of this information. I will hand over to Emily to talk about the work that has been done here.

[12 noon]

Ms E. Briggs: Thank you, minister. Yes, that is absolutely correct, as the minister set out. Through this work, we are working collaboratively with other leading organisations such as universities, the Bureau of Meteorology and other jurisdictions to pull together that best practice information and what it will look like for the community as that one-stop-shop website. People will be able to download a guide that gives them that sort of step-by-step strategy on how to start to look at the impacts of climate change on water. Users like local governments, businesses and community groups could start to use these materials to look at the projections for what water resources could look like in different scenarios in the future and then, importantly, use that information to think about how to adapt and build resilience to climate change.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Sometimes we do not utilise our own resources. A botanist at the University of Western Australia, Professor Pauline Grierson, has done some absolutely outstanding work on the history of rainfall in the state. I suggest that it is the best scientific work that has been done to look at that. The long and short of her research is that it just happens that European settlement corresponds with the wettest period in Western Australia in the last 400 years. For extended periods in that 400-year period, rainfall was one-third of what it was when the British arrived. By the way, she is a big believer in man-made impacts on climate, but the truth is that in recent history, the state has been vastly dryer than since European settlement. Outside the impacts of climate change, her research shows that there are decadal long periods—up to 30-year periods—of extreme drought like we are experiencing this year. I think Professor Grierson is an outstanding Western Australian and would be a great contact for the department. Regarding the part that we were talking about, are FTEs in the department associated with that or is this more an activity that is being funded, such as the website and the like?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will ask Ms Briggs to answer that question.

Ms E. Briggs: I believe for us it is a mix of resources—FTE and the department, and then funding agreements with our project partners who help deliver some of that credible science and information. Some of the funding also goes towards building that online portal. It is a combination.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 678 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2 and service 1, “Water Information and Advice”. The water information listed in the budget is quantity, quality, location et cetera. Is that information publicly available or is that information simply retained for the department’s own use?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to Ms Briggs again.

Ms E. Briggs: Yes, a range of different information is available publicly online. We have various different types of information, such as water allocation plans, water allocation plan evaluations and a range of different public consultations. We have a wide range of different types of information. Some of it will obviously be internal as we are working through it and using it to inform future plans, but once it has been through that process, the lion’s share is available publicly online.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Just to be clear, is the outcome of that research and work publicly available for people to view?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will ask Ms Briggs to speak to that. Some of the information under the heading “Water Information and Advice” in the budget paper is obviously, by its nature, publicly available, but some of it is not. For instance, water licences are not publicly available. Some of the data that informs that or others might be commercial-in-confidence. I will ask Ms Briggs to make any other comments.

Ms E. Briggs: I would just build upon that to say that it is absolutely right. Aside from the licences, which the minister has already tackled, the department is obviously doing a lot of research and development and a lot of groundwater investigation. Although that is through the investigative process, we will be collecting that data and information and using it internally, but when we pull it together and bring it into final facing documents, such as allocation plans, those are of course publicly available online.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 679 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2 and “Water Planning, Allocation and Optimisation”. I assume this is the correct section. What efforts are being made to identify and quantify sustainable new water resources? I will cut to the chase on this one. I have had feedback from growers, particularly in the Carnarvon area, that water allocations are affected by currently available water resources, but their belief is that there are substantial water resources to the east of Carnarvon, obviously—the west is wet, but salty—that are not being utilised or are not intended to be utilised to provide additional water for the horticulturalists there.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am trying to find the right information around this because a lot of work is done in this area. I am making sure that I give the member an accurate picture. Some of the work on accessing our water supplies is done through the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation and some is done through the Water Corporation. Allocation planning is done under this department, but was the member talking about Carnarvon and inland?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes. The minister is probably familiar that Carnarvon water users are pretty active and they like to get into her ear, but there are groundwater resources that are already utilised. Part of that is used for the town and part is used for horticulturalists when the river is not flowing and they have utilised the water that they are allowed to take from the riverbed. An assertion was put to me, however, that there are quite substantial groundwater resources further east that are not available. What effort has been made to identify those? Has any effort been made to identify those and could those be utilised? This will cross over into the Water Corporation.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right; I think so. If the member is asking what water plans apply in areas east of Carnarvon and the like, it is difficult to have all that information to hand.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am happy to ask a question on notice.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, perhaps the member can ask a question separately. I am happy to get him that information. I have been Minister for Water for about 18 months and I understand that these are issues for some sections of our communities, whether in the goldfields, Exmouth or the great southern. The geography, infrastructure, industrial and community needs are all very different and the opportunities for new water sources are very different across all those areas. If the member specifies an area, I am happy to follow that up.

[12.10 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I do not want to paraphrase, because I am not quite sure how familiar I am with the complexity of Carnarvon's water situation, but perhaps the question can be framed as: is any active work being done by the department on groundwater investigations to prove up additional resource in the Carnarvon area that would be for the use of the horticultural industry?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I could take that question as a supplementary, but I actually think a question on notice would be helpful, because we can then put a bit more context around the water planning that applies to that general area, and also take the question in the context of what else is occurring within the Water Corporation, not just for groundwater, because it could be that there are a range of different water supply options available for that area.

Dr D.J. HONEY: This is an exciting question. The minister will have guessed this one; she will be well briefed. Obviously, the minister is very aware that there is a lot of public discussion at the moment about the Coca-Cola bottling plant. I apologise, chair; I know you are about to grab me! I am looking at page 676 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2 and water planning, licensing et cetera. I refer to recent public concern in the media about the Coca-Cola bottling plant at Karragullen. Part of that public discussion has been that the department has said that this is a matter for the council to resolve and deal with. Apparently, in a radio interview this morning, the Deputy Mayor of the City of Gosnells was discussing this matter. The council had looked at its original documentation, and, apparently, according to that person, the original permission to proceed with that bore was given by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, so it was that department's initial responsibility.

Can the minister comment on the government and the department's responsibility for that matter? I suspect this could come as a surprise, but is the minister aware whether that is the case?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am good, but I am not so good that I can listen to the radio and be here at the same time! No, I am not aware of the details. I would caution against whether we are talking about the same projects or the same water sources. The member might be aware that some commercial companies that access groundwater or spring water for commercial purposes are in proclaimed areas and are operating under licences; others are not. I do not know the particular circumstances that the member is talking about and whether the then Department of Water, or whatever iteration it was in the early 1990s, gave advice on that matter.

There has been a lot of discussion about Coca-Cola and its operations in Roleystone. In that instance, there was a consideration by the local government to try to limit not only the take in terms of the water extraction, but also, importantly for the local community, the number of truck movements. When the local government tried to limit that, I think it was actually Hon Graham Kierath, who was the Minister for Planning and Heritage at the time, who overturned the desire of the local community and said that there should not be those limitations. As I am advised, that gives further restrictions on what we can do with our planning tools to try to restrict the amount of water that is taken by Coca-Cola.

Importantly, though, we are working with Coca-Cola and also with its peak body to understand the extractions that occur in this case of Coca-Cola and the Roleystone location that has been the matter of particular attention. As I said, it is in an unproclaimed area; therefore, there is no requirement for the bore to be licensed or the take to be measured. However, there have been some discussions between Coca-Cola and the Department of Water and Environmental

Regulation, and we are working hard to make that information public. That will give the community some comfort that some transparency will apply in that case. Obviously, this has been very difficult for the community in such a dry and hot summer.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is the department actively involved in monitoring or receiving monitoring reports of the impacts on the groundwater table in that area?

Ms S.F. McGURK: For the areas that we are talking about, if that area is not proclaimed, no. If they are proclaimed areas, there will be a water plan that applies to the entire groundwater system, and licences are then applied for and granted in accordance with that plan. Not only will people pay for their licence, but also there will be a limitation on how much they can take, and measurement will occur. But if an area is not proclaimed, there is no monitoring of extraction in that area, as I understand it.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is the minister considering whether it would be worthwhile to differentiate between commercial users that are selling the water and, for example, horticulturalists in those areas who are extracting water for horticultural use?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There is no capacity under the current legislation for me to do that. If an area is proclaimed, as I said before, any extraction would be licensed and then monitored. If the area is not proclaimed, none of those rules applies. That is one of the challenges that exist in the case of people's awareness in a season like we are experiencing now, just coming off the back of summer, when horticulturalists and orchardists in particular are really feeling the impacts of climate change. It has been really difficult for them to watch Coca-Cola pulling out good-quality water and taking it off to its plant to bottle it. But it is difficult for us to proclaim that area and then license or charge for that water without impacting the horticulturalists.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes, absolutely. I think it is a vexed issue in the sense that I am sure the horticulturalists would like to limit the take of the commercial users, but, equally, probably would not be too keen on having that area proclaimed and becoming subject to those limitations themselves.

Is Coca-Cola required to report the amount of water it takes from that bore to government in any form, or, because it is an unproclaimed area, does it not have to report the water it takes from that bore?

Ms S.F. McGURK: My understanding is that it does not, but I will hand over to Mr Shaw to give some more detail.

Mr C. Shaw: Thank you, minister. That is correct; there is no statutory requirement for Coca-Cola to report to us. That said, we are working closely with local governments, which have the closest regulatory controls over these projects, to provide advice and obtain more information when we can voluntarily.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am conscious of the time. I refer to page 678 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2 and the table under "Water Information and Advice". I am looking at the last line of that table, which has the average cost per water measurement site managed. I am interested in what is involved in that task, given that it is a reasonably significant sum.

[12.20 pm]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is the member referring to note 4 on the average cost per water measurement?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: These sites are essential for monitoring factors impacting on water quality and availability across WA. Access to reliable and current information about the quality and quantity of water resources is a core input to decision-making by government and water-dependent businesses to enable the growth and development of our state. Stakeholders access water information and data to support investment and business decisions. This information also supports accurate water resource management decisions and advice. To service this need, the department measures or holds water data for more than 150 000 groundwater and surface water field sites, verifies and stores the data and makes the data available as water information. Regular or periodic field measurements are essential to maintain up-to-date data and verification. Storage and accessibility of the data are essential in making the data available as reliable information.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The north Wanneroo licence reductions are due to come into place in 2029. As part of that, the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation was suggesting a range of activities, such as training activities for farmers in efficient water use and also, potentially, consolidation. Can the minister say whether the government is determined to progress with the 10 per cent reduction in water allocation in that north Wanneroo area? What progress has been made in terms of the measures the government announced it would take to help with this transition?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Just to correct the member, this will take effect in 2028. The *Gnangara groundwater allocation plan* was released in June 2022 as part of new measures to protect precious groundwater resources impacted by the effects of climate change. As I said, the plan was released in June 2022. As the member mentioned himself, we have seen the impacts of climate change through reduced rainfall since 1980. Increased groundwater abstraction has also seen watertables fall by up to 10 metres—a 1 000-gigalitre loss of aquifer storage equivalent to the metric

of a thousand Optus Stadiums full of water. We know how much groundwater has fallen by since that period. The release of the final 2022 plan followed several years of extensive stakeholder engagement and consultation and over six years of detailed scientific assessments and groundwater modelling. The allocation plan for Gngangara and the alignment of the garden bore sprinkler roster with the scheme sprinkler roster will save 70 gigalitres of water each year. I also mention that the Water Corporation is reducing its baseline abstraction by 27 per cent. As the member said, the entitlements for most other licensed groundwater users will reduce by 10 per cent. That will go ahead.

The state government committed \$11.5 million over four years to support the horticultural industry, local government and garden bore users to adapt to this reduction. As of April this year, funding agreements with all nine eligible local governments for the Gngangara waterwise council grants program have been finalised and payments have been approved for projects to help those councils reduce their groundwater use. Under the Gngangara horticulture water use efficiency grants program, led by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, over half a million dollars' worth of projects were approved for efficiency grants, with the state government contributing half of that—\$243 000. Additional money is being provided in vouchers for growers to obtain expert advice on water-use efficiency. Money is also being made available to the nursery and gardening industry of WA to improve the uptake of the Australian plant production standard best practice certification and accreditation. I will leave it at that. To answer the member's question, it is going ahead in 2028. We are making funding available to the industry, and particularly to individual growers to help them understand and reduce their own water use in the lead-up to that reduction.

Dr D.J. HONEY: In relation to that money for advice, I have been pretty actively involved with the growers in that area and many of them saw that as almost a deliberate insult—I know the minister was not the responsible minister—in the sense that they do not deliberately waste water and many of them have world-beating technology. The Trandos brothers' seed stock plant, for example, has an amazing level of technology. Has there been any uptake by growers of the vouchers for advice on more efficient water use? Have they actually been utilised by growers?

Ms S.F. McGURK: As I said, over half a million dollars has been made available to growers, with the government providing \$243 000 of that. We are looking at how to make any unused grant allocation that has not been taken up more accessible for growers. For instance, we had feedback that some of them lease properties so there is no incentive to co-contribute, so we were asked to look at reframing the grants project to make it more available. We want to get the money out there. I understand that some might feel very confident in their water-use technology. When we were down in Manjimup recently, we visited an avocado farm that had instigated some drip technology over the last couple of years. It has reduced its water usage in areas in which that drip technology has been incorporated by up to 30 per cent. Technology is emerging all the time and there are some real opportunities for growers to not only reduce their water use, but also save money, which I am sure would be welcome for any producer.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to the note on the rural water planning program on page 678. I am just trying to get an understanding of the quantum of that program and what it is actually doing. How does it relate to the rural water grants and how does it then relate back to what was the farm and pastoral water rebate scheme? I am trying to understand what still exists out of that original program. Is it just the planning money?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No. Under the rural water planning, again, some very practical assistance has been given. As we know, this comes at a time that has been very challenging for the agricultural sector in all its forms. First of all, there was \$11.5 million over four years, from 2021–22 to 2024–25, in state and commonwealth funding for agriculture area dams. The commonwealth government contributed \$3.6 million in 2023–24, with the state government contributing the balance of \$7.8 million. The program is continuing in 2024–25 and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation is seeking further support from the commonwealth to continue the program. These two important programs have increased non-potable strategic off-farm water supplies—for example, to meet firefighter water needs in the dryland agricultural areas. The community water supplies partnerships program has provided more than \$4.3 million for 59 projects over 37 local government authorities since 2021. On 13 May this year, I announced that the community water supplies partnerships program will be extended to more regional communities in the south west and great southern. The \$1.5 million expansion is part of the \$8.6 million Cook Labor government funding to help farmers manage the impact of drought conditions.

[12.30 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: As I understand it, those projects are all off farm. They are community projects. I have talked about the farm and pastoral water grants scheme. There used to be a program through which people could get funding assistance to do a water plan for their farm business, and then there would be funding in a co-contribution model with the state government to implement the planning. People could not get the grant unless they had done the planning. I understand that the grant funding was removed by this government sometime in the last term. I want to clarify, outside what the minister just announced for farmers in the south west, which I think is repurposed funding from the old southern forests program, whether funding is available for people who own farm or pastoral businesses, for example, who may be experiencing dry circumstances at the moment to improve, on scheme or off scheme, their water self-sufficiency on farm.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I know the member has asked about this a couple of times in the Legislative Assembly. Obviously, the program of water carting for water deficiency declarations is in place at the moment for Salmon Gums and Grass Patch. That assistance is available. I was talking about being in Manjimup at the Winfield's family avocado farm with the local member and the Minister for Regional Development. We announced the southern forests infrastructure support scheme in the Warren–Donnelly region. That is \$10 million for horticultural producers to improve their farms' water security. That is where I heard the example about drip irrigation, which that farm adopted early on. I think the member is talking about the pastoral water grants scheme.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It was for farm and pastoral businesses.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That closed in 2017 but was refocused on community-based projects. The member is right about the on-farm program, but the money was not taken away; it was put into community-based projects. I have been out in communities where people have been able to see the benefits of the community-based projects. As the member is very well aware, the Dry Season Taskforce has been convened to look at opportunities for our government to assist regional communities during these challenging dry conditions. That work is still underway.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, minister. That is great support for farmers in the horticultural area. It is a slightly different way of approaching it from what we were trying to do, which was through the southern forests pipeline project. I understand that has been abandoned. We are all very supportive of creating on-farm opportunities for those businesses. I am particularly talking about broadacre farmers who have animal welfare issues. The minister has talked about some of the community water programs. We ran them in addition to providing support for businesses to improve their self-sufficiency on farm. Given we have drought conditions and dry seasons across a large part of the agricultural industry, for broadacre farmers in particular, has there been any consideration of bringing that back? If not, why is this something that the government resists, given that it has shown support for farmers in the great southern part of the state through direct on-farm grants?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The \$10 million for that area is not to be sneezed at. It is a significant amount of money.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, it is.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It was an acknowledgement that it is the food bowl, in many respects, for our state. There was a lot of debate about the previous southern forests programs, including the dam proposal, for which the previous state government made money available. We are not taking away that money, so that is good. There are allocations for farm water supply planning schemes, which is a current DWER program. It is a rebate to commercial broadacre farmers to fund an audit of their water supply. A list of auditors and information are available on the DWER website. I think that is important. It is important to note that that support is available. Again, an \$8.6 million funding package to help farmers through the drought conditions is not insignificant work that has been done to make sure the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation is working with farmers in different regions to understand their needs. Having direct government funding for on-farm supply measures is one thing, but helping to build up the understanding of government agencies to work with individual farmers and their industry bodies to understand how we adapt in the face of climate change is really important and something we are very committed to doing as a government.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: My point is that the government's reallocation of southern forests funding for direct on-farm grants in that area shows there is no ideological opposition to providing support for individual businesses to improve their self-sufficiency and efficiency in water use, which I think is a great outcome. At the moment, the water planning funding is still there from the previous farm water and pastoral grants but not the bit so that individual farmers can then partner with the government to improve on-farm efficiency, in addition to the community water supply program, which I am fully supportive of and we increased funding for when we were in government. It was all done when we were in government. We have an acute issue at the moment. I think it is a little bit short-sighted to take away one of those avenues to assist farmers who might be on scheme, which is very expensive water, or off scheme, where the water supply does not exist, to ensure that they are managing that resource as efficiently as possible. By linking with those businesses, the government can have some influence over policy, as the minister said, in the southern part of the state.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I was a bit frustrated because some of this happens across the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, and the Water Corporation has separate programs. I was reading the notes on these programs this morning. Ongoing renewals for wheatbelt farmlands water supply mains have been in place since 2015. Under the Water Corporation's work, the objective is to reduce the risk of water supply interruptions to regional towns and rural properties.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is a different program, minister.

[12.40 pm]

Ms S.F. McGURK: It will also minimise the risk of water mains bursts closing. A total of \$44 million has been invested by the state government on this program since 2015. Part of this project is to replace longer lengths of above-ground pipes et cetera. Under the previous government, from 2014–15 to 2016–17, probably partly when

the member for Central Wheatbelt was the minister, \$6 million was spent on the program. Under our government, in a single year, in 2021–22, \$8 million was spent. The remainder of that \$44 million has been spent under our government. It is not the case that we are ignoring these communities or ignoring the challenges they have. We are very committed, with the challenges we have with our state’s geography, to providing reliable water services to these communities.

In February this year, the member for Central Wheatbelt released a statement headed “Wheatbelt Power Infrastructure Must Improve”. She is reported in that release, dated 8 February, as saying —

“For example, when I was Minister for Water the previous Government, we invested over \$32 million allocated to upgrade the farmland water supply, reducing leaks, and worked to improve reliability for customers who regularly experienced water supply issues.

We could find only \$6 million of that money. As I said, it was \$6 million over three years, but we have exceeded that amount in just one year. Between 2014 and 2024, a total of \$44 million has been spent to improve their water supply reliability. Direct grants to farmers are one thing. Making sure that we provide good scientific advice to farmers and their peak bodies and getting infrastructure to those areas are challenges, but they are challenges I believe we are meeting as a government.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can the minister confirm that under the repurposing of the southern forests funding that goes to farmers in the south west, there are direct grants to farm businesses?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right.

The appropriation was recommended.

Water Corporation —

Mrs M.R. Marshall, Chair.

Ms S.F. McGurk, Minister for Water.

Mr P. Donovan, Chief Executive Officer.

Ms D. Evans, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr E. Hambleton, General Manager, Assets Planning and Delivery.

Mrs K. Willis, General Manager, Customer and Community Group.

Dr S. Gallacher, Chief of Staff, Minister for Water.

[Witness 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. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point.

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.

I give the call to the member for Cottesloe.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I thank the advisers from the department for coming along. I would like to spend about two hours with the advisers today, but we have only 15 minutes. Government members might say that is our fault! I am sure the member for Cannington will remind us.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It is your fault!

Dr D.J. HONEY: Can I cut to the chase. It is all important, member.

On page 808 of budget paper No 2, reference is made to greenhouse gas emissions and renewables. At one stage, the Water Corporation had a proposal to spend \$255 million on installing its own battery network, if you like, as part of its renewable response. Infrastructure WA did an assessment of that proposal and said that it would not be a good use of the corporation’s money. I am intrigued to learn why the Water Corporation considered that and is it considering similar ventures in the future?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will start to answer and then I will hand over to Mr Donovan. The corporation’s energy procurement plan is an important part of the organisation’s work. As the member would be aware, the state government has given a commitment to reduce its greenhouse emissions by 80 per cent by 2030 and, of course, the Water Corporation’s emissions will be taken into account. It is a big user of energy. It has some internal goals, but its obligations as a corporate citizen are important. Over the last five years, almost half of Perth’s drinking water has come from the two desalination plants in Perth. The latest planning indicates that multiple new water

sources delivering between 75 gegalitres and 125 gegalitres a year will be required over the next decade. Of course, the first of these new water sources is in Alkimos. Initially, it is expected to deliver 50 gegalitres when it comes into operation by mid-2028. Although desalination is a secure water source because it does not depend on rain, it is energy intensive. The process of desalination is four times more energy intensive than groundwater collection and more than 40 times more energy intensive than water sourced from dams. That is why the Water Corporation has set itself a target of net zero by 2035 and committed to securing up to 400 megawatts of additional renewables through wind. This will enable all three Water Corporation desalination plants to be powered with renewable energy. The state government has taken the next significant step towards achieving the target of net zero by securing the development rights for one of WA's largest renewable projects at Flat Rocks wind farm stage 2. Since procuring the development rights of the wind farm from developers, the Water Corporation has been investigating means to further increase the capacity of that project. It will continue to do this work in terms of not only desalination, but also its own energy footprint with its fleet vehicles, carbon offsets and the like. Before I hand over to Mr Donovan, I add that around 5 400 solar panels have been installed on 50 Water Corporation sites statewide and about 9 000 megawatt hours of power have been produced at Woodman Point by capturing and reusing biogas, a byproduct of wastewater treatment processes, which reduces emissions by some 5 800 tonnes. A soon-to-be-completed renewable generator at the Beenyup water resource recovery facility in Craigie will reduce carbon emissions by more than 10 000 tonnes a year. The generator provides biogas to the stage 2 advanced water-recycling plant. The design of the Perth and southern desalination plants reduces overall energy use by up to 60 per cent. I have also mentioned the electric and hybrid vehicles within the Water Corporation's fleet.

[12.50 pm]

Mr P. Donovan: The minister has covered the landscape really well. Talking to the examples of all the areas we are looking at to reduce our carbon footprint, particularly, as the minister mentioned, with desalination being energy intensive, as we know, we need to ensure that we are doing all we can to reduce our carbon footprint. Batteries was one of the things we evaluated. We put a business case through for batteries as an option. We continue to evaluate many other ways of reducing our carbon footprint. Obviously, we have acquired the rights to develop a wind farm in Kojonup, which was part of our plan. We continue to look at all options, including acquiring land for providing Australian Carbon Credit Units and offsets. That is the way we would approach anything when developing a business case and then running it through the process.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Are there any more plans for the corporation to install its own battery banks?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will outline and reiterate the Water Corporation's commitment as part of the government's overall objective of reducing our emissions by 80 per cent by 2030. We mentioned some of those in detail. Wastewater recycling is another element worth adding, along with the revegetation projects that Pat Donovan mentioned. This is an ongoing piece of work to make sure that the proposals that are in place—for instance, Flat Rocks wind farm stage 2—are delivered and able to produce power and contribute to the reduction and other mechanisms, which will be ongoing, not just until 2030 or to meet the Water Corporation's internal goal of net zero by 2035. We will obviously keep on top of that. That ongoing reduction will be a big part of the corporation's work in the future.

Ms M. BEARD: This is something that I have raised in the past, so it will not be new to the minister. It relates to the fixtures charge. It is known as a toilet tax in my patch. It is a fee charged to people for every toilet in their business. It is not based on a user-pays system; it is an annual charge. I think it is \$1 127 for one toilet and then it scales down. I can show the minister where it is in the budget papers. I am interested to know what portion of the revenue collected that charge represents. Can it be broken down into what it represents in the regions as a percentage of their income? I am trying to determine whether it is a large or small amount. At the moment, some people in the regions are really struggling with the costs of doing business. In some areas, tourism is down by 50 per cent and business owners still have to pay this fixed fee, which they are struggling to pay.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It may not be surprising, but I do not have specific details on the revenue for additional toilets. I was trying to get hold of—I know I looked at it—the subsidy provided to regional water users by the Water Corporation, which is a significant country water pricing subsidy. I understand that the water pricing component of this subsidy is \$475 million for one year. That is the subsidy that the state government pays, through the Water Corporation, to ensure cost reflectivity for country water users so they are not charged the actual cost of supplying water to their communities. There is also the question of cost reflectivity; that is, how much do we charge as a proportion of what it costs to provide those services? It is vastly underallocated in regional WA. Less than 50 per cent of what it costs to provide water is charged to those providers. I do not have any information on the member's specific question about the additional charges for extra toilets.

Ms M. BEARD: Is it possible to get that information?

Ms S.F. McGURK: These questions are off-budget. I ask the member to put the question on notice. Are we talking about regional areas? Are we talking about all additional toilets for commercial or residential use? I reiterate that the extent to which regional communities are subsidised for their water use is sometimes underestimated.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It is the same as power and emergency services.

Ms M. BEARD: I appreciate that. I will not have an opportunity to further explain outside of this place that I am talking about businesses. For example, a motel with 60 rooms—so there are 60 toilets—is charged an individual fee. It might be busy for only four or five months a year, with a really low occupancy for the rest of the year. Those facilities are not used during that time. The toilets are not being flushed. I want to bring this to the minister's attention. I am advised that the only thing people can do is get the water flow to the toilets cut off by a registered plumber, which comes at a cost. To get them reinstated, it is a whole new outfit. This is causing issues around the potential growth of tourism in the regions.

The purpose of my question is to find out whether there is another way to take some pressure off those businesses. I appreciate what the minister is saying about the subsidies, but it is having an enormous effect. It has come to such a point that the owners of one caravan park have put cracker dust through the whole park and taken out the lawn as they say it is like putting liquid gold onto their lawn, which is just the cost of water. That is a choice they have made. On top of that is the fee they are paying for the toilets. They are not renting out the rooms and they cannot recoup those costs.

Ms S.F. McGURK: In response to that, I will just say that I have been the Minister for Water for 18 months and this issue has not been raised with me. I am happy to look at it. I am not sure that it is a new charge.

Ms M. BEARD: No, it is not.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It has been in place over successive governments, so there have been other opportunities for this to be addressed. At the end of her question, the member asked what sort of green spaces or water efficiency measures are in place for different businesses. As we know, we live in an increasingly drying climate, which is something that the Water Corporation and the state government take really seriously. We need to adapt. We try to ensure that green areas in public spaces or within a business are waterwise and that we are using efficient watering systems and native vegetation. All those measures are being taken. Quite a few subsidies are available to assist businesses. The CEO just pointed out to me that the Waterwise business program is an example. Information and, in some cases, grants and subsidies are available. That business program in itself has saved 135 billion litres of water since 2007. Programs are available, information is certainly available and, in some cases, subsidies are available.

Ms M. BEARD: I have one last question.

The CHAIR: Noting the time, we will probably have to wrap it up. Can we be quick.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have a new question, which is a quick one.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Did the member for Cottesloe just interrupt the member for North West Central?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I did.

Ms S.F. McGURK: He completely overruled her question.

Dr D.J. HONEY: She understands. Minister, how many maintenance workers have been insourced into the Water Corporation as part of the insourcing of the Water Corporation's maintenance program?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Through the chair, it is one o'clock. The member for North West Central had started to ask a supplementary question. She was interrupted by the member for Cottesloe, who wanted to ask his question. He can put a question on notice. He has adequate opportunity to do that. Not only was it rude, but also he has had the four hours during which I have been sitting here to time his questions. He can put the question on notice.

Dr D.J. HONEY: We are a dynamic team over here!

The CHAIR: Given the time, that completes the examination of the Water Corporation.

Meeting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm

Division 35: Communities — Services 1 and 3 to 6, Early Childhood Education, Child Protection, Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Community Services —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Ms S.E. Winton, Minister for Early Childhood Education.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General, Department of Communities.

Dr N. Leggett, Director, Office of Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence.

Mr P. Payne, Deputy Director General, Profession Standards, Regulation and Quality.

Mr W. Millen, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr B. Whitehouse, Executive Director, Statewide Services.

Ms C. Irwin, Assistant Director General, Strategy and Partnerships.

Mr C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Early Childhood Education.

[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. I 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 she 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 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 Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the significant issues impacting the agency on page 506 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. Paragraph 10 is under the heading “Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence”. Where is the funding to provide GPS monitoring of family and domestic violence offenders?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for the question. That is a line item in the Attorney General’s budget. It is not funded through my portfolio.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, minister. Does the minister have an understanding of when that legislation will be introduced into Parliament?

The CHAIR: Since that is a different portfolio, I do not know whether you can pursue that at this stage.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy to answer that.

The CHAIR: All right. Thank you, minister. That is very generous of you.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will repeat what I said in the Legislative Assembly I think last week. It is a priority piece of legislation and will come to Parliament as soon as it is ready.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you.

Ms M. BEARD: On page 503 is the line item “Child Protection Regional Workforce Attraction and Retention”. I have a query about the decrease in funding. Can the minister explain that to me?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Sorry; can the member repeat that? She is very softly spoken.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to the line item “Child Protection Regional Workforce Attraction and Retention”. There is no funding in 2025–26 and the subsequent years. I am wondering whether the minister can explain what that is used for.

Ms S.E. WINTON: As the member knows, it has been a priority of mine since I became the minister, and certainly it is a priority of the department, to ensure that we have a well-qualified and supported workforce right throughout the state, particularly in regard to child protection staff. We know that they do incredible work and so we are doing everything we can to ensure that we can attract and retain staff right around the state, particularly in some of those places where it is harder to attract and retain staff. One of the initiatives that we have been working hard on and is making a difference to the vacancy rates in those areas is the regional attraction and retention incentive whereby we are offering further incentives on top of the existing incentives for people to move into those areas. That has been well received. As at 31 March 2024, we have filled 402 RARI-eligible positions. In some of the places where it is more difficult to work, it is a significant incentive. In places like the Kimberley and the Pilbara, it means an additional \$13 000 for child protection workers on top of some significant incentives to work in regional and remote areas. I am very proud of the work that the child protection staff do. It was a key priority to keep supporting them and ensuring that we have qualified and capable people doing critically important but nonetheless challenging work.

Ms M. BEARD: I totally agree with the minister about the job they do. Those 402 positions are regional. Is there any way we can get a breakdown of the locations?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The RARI incentive that we put in place relates to *Commissioner’s instruction 38: Temporary regional attraction and retention incentives* and applies specifically to the Kimberley, Pilbara, midwest, Gascoyne, goldfields, Esperance and wheatbelt regions.

Ms M. BEARD: I will reframe my question. What are the vacancy rates in each of the towns in each of those regions?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I can confirm that at this point in time, the statewide vacancies for child protection staff is 10 per cent.

Ms M. BEARD: Can we not break it down by location?

Ms S.E. WINTON: We can break it down. As at 31 March, there is a statewide vacancy rate of 10 per cent for child protection. In the metropolitan area, it is nine per cent and in the regional area it is 13 per cent.

Ms M. BEARD: Will other strategies be put in place in 2025–26 or will that be reassessed?

[2.10 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: I can assure the member that we work constantly to attract and retain staff throughout the state, whether it is supporting our statewide services to support those areas with vacancies or other retention and attraction programs like our partnerships with universities. The attraction and retention of child protection staff is a key priority, like I said before. I work with the department on a weekly basis to drive down vacancies wherever possible because we know that the child protection workforce is a really critical part of any community to ensure that we keep children safe. It includes financial incentives like the ones I described previously and things like working with the university sector to develop a Bachelor of Social Work for Aboriginal employees. It is things like making sure that we have specialised calling qualification assessment frameworks and reviewing our processes to improve the current model. It is also about supporting existing staff through workplace violence and aggression programs to ensure that safety is in place for child protection staff, including trialling worker safety devices to improve incident responses and the workplace safety of our staff. It is an ongoing priority and I will not be satisfied until there are no vacancies in child protection.

Ms M. BEARD: Will part of the group of people the government is attracting to the regions be used to fill senior regional manager positions overseeing each of those locations?

Ms S.E. WINTON: My understanding is that the regional attraction and retention incentive applies to a range of roles within the child protection area. I might get Ben Whitehouse to provide a bit more detail.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Thank you, minister. The RARI fund does cover senior operational leaders within regions—those who operate and manage the frontline services.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Right at the bottom of page 524, reference is made to “Preventing and Responding to FDV” and Aboriginal family safety grants. Can the minister explain to me some detail about that grant program?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Thanks for the question. As the member would be aware, the government continues to focus on family and domestic violence, particularly for Aboriginal women. We know that they are disproportionately represented as victims of family and domestic violence. The member would know that the government established a taskforce that reported back to government with a system reform plan. As part of our commitment in accepting that system reform plan, the member would also know that some \$96.4 million of funding is in this year’s state budget to specifically deliver on those system reforms. One of those areas, as the member highlighted, is some \$6.3 million for grants to Aboriginal organisations to submit their ideas for localised and place-based solutions for family and domestic violence. I am happy for Dr Nicole Leggett to provide a little bit more detail.

Dr N. Leggett: The minister is exactly right. The Aboriginal family safety grants program is for Aboriginal-registered businesses and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to essentially seek funding for local and place-based solutions to family safety. They can put forward submissions for any type of activity that is really on a continuum, from prevention and community-based prevention work through to response work. The grants that they can seek are for up to a two-year period, and the grants program was opened and released on Tenders WA on 13 May.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the \$3 million and the subsequent \$3 million for implementing initiatives or is it to administer this grant program about ideas that will be helpful in dealing with FDV?

Ms S.E. WINTON: My advice is that \$6 million is to go to Aboriginal-controlled organisations and community groups to deliver place-based services to support Aboriginal woman and children impacted by family and domestic violence.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: For instance, the strategy calls for the likes of healing groups and healing spaces for men and women and on-country healing for boys and men to reset. Can the minister see those types of initiatives put in place within the next financial year? How long does the minister think some of those ideas could take to come into place and be effective on the ground?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I guess a really important part of this initiative is to listen to Aboriginal-led place-based solutions. That message was received loud and clear through the process of a taskforce. In that respect, it would be up to those Aboriginal-controlled organisations to put forward their initiatives of what they would like to see in their localised areas. I guess some of the things the member described could potentially be considered, but I will not pre-empt what the Aboriginal-led solutions would be. That would be inappropriate. We are seeking advice, suggestions and input from Aboriginal-controlled organisations to lead that work. Certainly, I would say Aboriginal women are over-represented in experiencing family and domestic violence, and there is always more to do, but this is the right step in getting Aboriginal people to come forward with the solutions they would like to see.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: For those Aboriginal organisations that the minister is referring to, is there a guideline as to the type of group? Can it be like a family group or must it be an organisation with an ABN? What types of groups can apply for these funding grants?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Dr Leggett to comment in a moment, but I would generally think that, through the tender process and the provision of government grants, it is appropriate that it is Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

The CHAIR: Dr Leggett. I have seen you, member for Vasse.

Dr N. Leggett: The minister is correct. It is Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, but also Aboriginal-registered businesses.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Are there any sorts of geographical restrictions on this or can it be someone from Esperance right through to Broome and right through the state?

Ms S.E. WINTON: No; it is statewide.

[2.20 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I just have a final one, if I can, madam chair.

The CHAIR: You said that last time, but fair enough.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The family safety strategy has called for long-term sustainable funding of programs that focus on family violence prevention and early intervention. I assume that this also fits within the guidelines, if you like, of the grant program.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Absolutely. I would also like to reinforce that many of the initiatives and investments we make in the area of family and domestic violence—whether through the budget process, the announcements we made in November or the \$420 million of investment since 2021—support Aboriginal women and children. I could give the member an example. When we talk about any of the investments we make in crisis accommodation, perpetrator responses or primary prevention, supporting Aboriginal families is a key part of all those investments.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have a response to the Aboriginal Family Legal Services, which called this funding a bandaid response to a pervasive health and welfare problem?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I would say that there is always more to do. I would also say that this response has been guided by sector partners, working closely with government to develop the system reform plan and the funding that was announced in this state budget. In that regard, I would again like to put on the record that non-government representatives did the hard slog of working on the taskforce. They represented not only voices across the state, but also a variety of service providers, whether they provide legal supports, financial supports or otherwise. We will continue to prioritise funding for the prevention of family and domestic violence. It is a scourge on our community right around the nation. Let us be clear: this \$96.4 million will not solve a complex issue that has been going on for many, many years. I will say that our funding is targeted. It is guided by sector experts in where they want us to direct particular funding, and we will continue to do that.

Ms L. METTAM: My question relates to page 506 and the significant issue in paragraph 10.7. What perpetrator programs are being introduced?

The CHAIR: It is at the bottom of page 506.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Everyone would know that when we talk about investing in the prevention of family and domestic violence, our government's approach has been based on what I would describe as three key planks. One plank is the important work of crisis support or supporting victims at the point of need. Importantly, a key plank is also perpetrators and primary prevention. This budget also sees us continue the investments that we have made over a number of years in perpetrator programs because we know that we need to change the cycle so that men change their ways. An example in this year's budget is a \$4.5 million funding uplift for the men's behaviour change program, which is better known as Breathing Space, in Maylands and Calista. I had the privilege of visiting that centre—I think it was late last year—and I spent about an hour and a half speaking to perpetrators who were part of the residential program that works intensively with men to change their ways. It is important work, and we have ensured in this year's budget that that can continue. Of course, we are also supporting Breathing Space in South Hedland. As well as that, we have invested significantly to support perpetrator programs in the regions. There is \$3.1 million over two years for three men's behaviour change programs in Bunbury, Albany and Northam. Importantly, as part of our partnership with the commonwealth, we have been able to trial men's workers in FDV response teams, particularly in Northam, Bunbury, Joondalup, Fremantle and Midland. They are part of the response team that, importantly, works with victims but also has the opportunity to go in and work with perpetrators after there has been a police report. Their role is not to support perpetrators; it is really to hold them to account and demand that they participate in programs to change their behaviour.

Ms L. METTAM: Why is there no funding in this year's budget for additional GPS ankle bracelets for perpetrators?

The CHAIR: Member, did you not hear the earlier answer? It is the Attorney General's portfolio.

Ms L. METTAM: That was about the legislation; this is about the funding.

The CHAIR: No; it was about the funding as well. Next question!

Ms S.E. WINTON: If I can, I will just explain.

The CHAIR: You are canvassing my ruling, minister. That is very courageous of you.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I just wanted to make it clear. I would answer the question if I could, but it is not a line item in my portfolio.

The CHAIR: All right. The next question is for the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I spoke to the minister briefly earlier about the Early Years partnership, which is in paragraph 9 on page 506 of the *Budget statements*. Of course, the minister and I were both there when the minister launched this program in Katanning. What are the minister's major aspirations for this partnership? What will it do differently from what has happened in the past?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for the question. I do remember; that was a fair while ago. I have been back to Katanning a few times since. The Early Years partnership is a really important piece of work that the government is doing in conjunction with not only the Minderoo Foundation, but also the Telethon Kids Institute. It is trying to do things a little bit differently, importantly, so we ensure that children aged from zero to four years are able to get the best start in life. The member would know that it is a collaboration between the Department of Communities, the Department of Education, the Department of Health and our non-government partners to try to do things differently. By doing things differently, I mean that four key communities have been identified as part of this program and they have been selected quite, I guess, strategically. One community is Katanning and its surrounds, which I think includes about eight local government areas. That is quite different from Armadale, another community group. Then we have Derby and two outlying communities, and the fourth location is Bidyadanga, which is about 300 kilometres from Broome. They were chosen quite strategically in the sense that they are very different communities and have very different needs. Also, they were chosen because the four areas had good leadership and good structures in place. The member would know that a fair bit of time has been spent at each of those locations, working with community and with families, to put together their own action plans for things the communities see as being important to invest in to allow the children to thrive. For example, in Katanning, one thing that was identified was family and domestic violence. That is quite different from Armadale, where they were talking about getting better support for child and maternal health checks. Somewhere like Bidyadanga, which is 300 kilometres out of Broome, is quite different from anywhere else. They said they needed more accommodation space so that visiting allied services could be accommodated to do important work with their community. Each of those four locations have put together their own action plan. In this year's budget, we have provisioned further money, with \$15.6 million from the government and, of course, an additional \$19 million from Minderoo Foundation, to now deliver on 24 key projects in those locations. They are very different in very different locations, but at the heart of all of them is support for families and children to thrive in their youngest years.

[2.30 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I understand that across the forward estimates, \$10.1 million of \$15.6 million has been allocated to communities. What is the contribution of the Telethon Kids Institute and Minderoo? Is it cash? Is it in kind?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will just ask about the Telethon Kids Institute, but Minderoo's is a \$19 million cash co-contribution with the state government's additional \$15.6 million. Collectively, that money will fund 24 key projects that have been identified in those four communities. One example is the construction of the early learning family centre in Derby. In Katanning in the great southern, which is the area the member is most interested in, it is for additional support for child dental health services, like I said, accommodation at Bidyadanga and more child and maternal health checks in Armadale. There are 24 discrete projects that will be funded out of that money.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How does the minister see its interaction with the Department of Education? Is it about identification of those students? How would that play out?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am not understanding the question.

The CHAIR: It is about the interaction of those projects with the education department.

Ms S.E. WINTON: There are 24 discrete projects and the vast majority are Department of Communities projects, but some discrete projects will be led by the Department of Education. That is why we will see them in its budget papers, although the Department of Communities is the lead. The important thing about this is that although the various funding streams might appear in different budgets—for example, the child and maternal health checks would sit in the health budget—there is a coordinating role and a community-led leadership group in each of those four places that come together. Representatives from each of the agencies and our partners are on the leadership groups in those communities.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to "Coercive Control Education and First Responder Training" on page 503 under "New Initiatives". Why has coercive control legislation not been introduced as a priority of this government?

The CHAIR: Minister, is that your portfolio?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy to answer a question about coercive control as it relates to my portfolio.

Coercive control is an insidious form of family and domestic violence. It is subtle and difficult to recognise. In fact, I would probably challenge everyone in the chamber that most of us would not even know what it looks like.

I have certainly had the conversation with my three daughters and they do not know what it looks like or how to identify it. When we talk about legislation and coercive control, it is really important that we understand it. I am talking about women understanding it, the men who perpetrate it understanding it and also, importantly, the judiciary, police and all the other people who intersect with victims of domestic violence understanding what it looks like. Our approach is guided by the sector, which has clearly said that we need to have a phased approach to criminalising it to ensure that we have the systems in place to make it successful. That is why I am really pleased that this budget includes funding to ensure that that important work is undertaken. We have to get this right.

Ms L. METTAM: I understand the point that the minister makes about ensuring that people understand it before it is legislated, but what sort of timeframe are we looking at for legislation that will complement the education program?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Our government has made significant legislative changes throughout our term because we have prioritised keeping women and children safe and will continue to do that, but when we introduce legislation, we absolutely need to make sure that we get it right. We do not want unintended consequences. This investment is ensuring that we continue to do that important work around coercive control and that educating various sections of the community on coercive control occurs. That is what I am focused on. This year's budget investment shows our continued determination to do everything we can with legislation to keep women and children safe. We are not going to be rushed into something. We will take guidance from our sector partners in doing this important work, particularly, in the first instance, with the Department of Justice. We will continue to consult with experts on this.

Ms L. METTAM: Is this education within the context of the government's proposed coercive control legislation? Is the education about what the legislation will look like, or is it just about coercive control and raising the awareness of coercive control as an issue?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Dr Leggett to provide some more detail.

Dr N. Leggett: Thank you for the question. This initiative is about more general awareness raising about family and domestic violence and coercive control, which the legislation and then the implementation of the legislation will build on.

Ms L. METTAM: What is the targeted cohort for the coercive control education and training? How is the government getting that message out?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The department is collaborating with the Department of Justice on this new program to identify the specific cohorts of professionals to be targeted—the member would appreciate there are many—and the scope of the training program and to utilise the existing training materials. It is anticipated the target procurement will be undertaken to identify a suitable provider to develop the training program.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to service 6 in the service summary table on page 509, "Care Arrangements and Support Services for Children in the CEO's Care". I can see that the 2023–24 budget amount was lower than what was provided and then it drops again to \$662 million in 2024–25. Can the minister identify what the reasons might be?

[2.40 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: The member and everyone in the chamber knows that our recommissioning process has led to a significant amount of reform in the out-of-home-care sector. Certainly, that has been a significant piece of work. Basically, the heart of the reform is to have more Aboriginal community-controlled organisations doing this important work with children in care so that we have greater stability and more options for not only children, but also their siblings to stay together. It will allow for better and earlier reunification and is a flexible approach. That transition process is a complex piece of work. As we transition children from the old system to the new system, in effect, we have two systems operating at the same time. I am happy for Ben to provide some detail on the quantum.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Thank you, minister. The minister is absolutely correct. The Department of Communities places 20 per cent of the children in the care of the department with community sector organisations. An element of the recommissioning process occurred last year, and the fundamental aims were to increase the number of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations caring for Aboriginal children—so, placing Aboriginal children with family carers or ACCOs, as well as better targeting resources to children depending on their needs. If a child has highly complex needs, their care arrangement is resourced at a higher level than that for a child with less complex needs, so it is using a finite resource in the most effective way. The funding that the member referred to is essentially, as we transition, used to scale up new providers at the same time as scaling down old providers. So there is an element of funding two systems as we assertively transition children from previous providers to new providers.

Ms M. BEARD: Is the minister saying that the reduction in this line item has been moved somewhere else, so the service levels have not reduced? The reduction in money does not mean a reduction in the services being offered?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Mr Mike Rowe to elaborate.

Mr M. Rowe: Thank you very much. I would see it more as a really significant uplift in investment in really vulnerable children who need it. As the minister and Mr Whitehouse have explained, it is not just about transitioning from an old system to a new system. The new system is fundamentally different and better because it is more

bespoke to the complex requirements of individual children. As both the minister and Mr Whitehouse said earlier, the new system is much more geared towards better placements for Aboriginal children with Aboriginal carers and ultimately with Aboriginal families, but it also has some new types of care that we have not previously had in the system. Temporary care homes have been set up across the state, so the funding includes the purchasing and set-up of those new homes. That gives us a bit more capacity in the system for emergency placements. The system is a lot more sophisticated than we have had in the past. It is the result of 10 years of engagement with the sector over what a better system would look like. It is a pretty significant moment for our agency, and it is a very significant commissioning process. We are in the middle of transitioning those children into the new arrangement. Fundamentally, it is a better arrangement for children in care.

Ms M. BEARD: Is the minister able to tell me how many children are in the old system and how many have been transitioned to the new system?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I just want to make the point that this out-of-home-care reform relates to 1 000 children in total, and, of those, I am advised that some 80 per cent have already been transitioned over, which is a significant achievement given the complexities involved.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I refer to page 504 of budget paper No 2, under spending changes and new initiatives, and the second line item on that page, “Flexible Support Package”. Could the minister explain what the flexible support package is and how it will provide tailored assistance to victim–survivors, please?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for Mirrabooka for her question and for her advocacy for victims of family and domestic violence. She has some incredible people working in her patch day in, day out to support women and children.

The flexible support package is a really important piece of funding. It is individualised funding that allows victim–survivors to overcome practical barriers. Practical barriers are very different for different women; for example, a woman may have entered a refuge and needs repairs to her car to maintain employment or get her child to school. In other instances, it might be that the woman needs support to get her driver’s licence in the first place. Some women from regional areas may not feel safe living in a refuge in a small town where the perpetrator resides, so the flexible support might be travel costs to relocate. The package allows us to tailor supports to the needs of individual women. The evaluation of the previous flexible support funding program identified that over 4 000 women had been receiving assistance through that program. The 34 organisations that are in receipt of this funding have overwhelmingly given positive feedback on the program and the flexibility it gives them in their capacity to assist women. Certainly, each time I have gone to a refuge or visited support services that help women, they talk particularly about the importance of this funding stream that allows them to support women and children with their needs. It is a really important part of this year’s budget.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 503 and the line item “FDV Taskforce—Strengthen Responses”. One issue that came up with the Family and Domestic Violence Taskforce was emergency service or police response times. I am talking specifically about the late Lynn Cannon, whose sister called for a more urgent response to calls involving the risk of family and domestic violence. In that case, Lynn was threatened that day. Her murderer was armed with a weapon.

The CHAIR: I suspect the minister is familiar with that case, for brevity’s sake.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay. Is the taskforce doing any work in response to that particular issue?

The CHAIR: That is the police portfolio, but if you are able to answer it, minister, do. If you are not, do not.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes. I am not going to be able to talk about police response times. Clearly, that is not in my portfolio, but I will say that one of the key things that the taskforce highlighted to us was the FDV response teams, which are a co-location, really, of the important people who support victim–survivors. There are 17 family and domestic violence response teams around the state, with eight in the regions, and police, child protection staff and community service sector advocates are co-located together. They do that important work post police call-outs to assess those incidents and ensure that supports are put in place to support victim–survivors in the days and weeks that follow. The member will note a significant uplift for those teams in this year’s budget of some \$53.8 million. We know FDV does not happen nine to five; it is something that happens seven days a week, so it is really important that we provide support to those teams to be able to operate seven days a week. Importantly, part of that \$58.3 million will enable more people to join those teams, including corrective services staff, family support officers and the like. I have had the chance to visit, I think, three of those places. The work they do is critically important in not only assessing the incidents that police have gone out to, but also triaging them and making sure that the support services go out there to ensure that those women and children are safe.

[2.50 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: As part of the role of the family and domestic violence support teams and in response to alarm that has been raised, has any work been done to better inform those first responders when a 000 call is made, given that, in some instances, it is the first port of call?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Dr Leggett just reminded me that I went to visit them. Part of our election commitment in 2021 was to support the training of first responders, including members of St John Ambulance, to assess the 000 calls that the member is talking about and to understand when FDV is present. I had the privilege to go out and meet them. That was a key part of what the taskforce was telling us. One of the four key pillars of the taskforce was around workforce development not just in the key areas—that is, first responders or people in the sector who support victim-survivors—but also more broadly, in everyone’s workplace.

Ms L. METTAM: I understand that it was a 2021 commitment. Is that funding in place and is training, informed by the issues that have been raised by people such as Lynn Cannon’s family, currently happening?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Dr Leggett to explain.

Dr N. Leggett: The initiative that the minister referred to is funding that is provided to St John. It is an ongoing initiative. That funding is used to train its paid paramedics, volunteers and 000 call takers to be able to be better placed to identify and respond to family and domestic violence when taking calls, at the scene or when providing ambulance services or whatever it might be.

Ms L. METTAM: I have a further question.

The CHAIR: I know where you are going to go with this one, member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: Have the significant concerns that have been raised by Lynn’s family better informed the training that is happening?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am not sure whether the training of first responders at St John can be connected with the training of police. I think that might be a question for the Minister for Police. I seek your guidance, chair.

The CHAIR: That is why I thought there were some issues with it, minister. The member for Roe with a new question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 136 of budget paper No 3 and the investment in child protection services, where it states —

- \$46.3 million to expand the Home Stretch WA program to meet increased demand for placements across metropolitan and regional areas and cover ongoing program administration costs;

What was the expected initial level of demand for this service?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Home Stretch is a really important flagship program that was first introduced under the McGowan government and is being continued through a further investment in this budget. This program backs in young people in the out-of-home-care system and acknowledges that we are not going to stop supporting them when they turn 18. We know that the age of 18 is a challenging time in life, particularly for those who have not had the best start in life. Home Stretch is important in making sure that we back them in and keep those supports going. There can be a range of support. In the first instance, if their care arrangement is such that the family wants to continue supporting them, we are able to continue to support them financially through Home Stretch to continue that arrangement with that young person. Additionally, they can be supported in finishing school, with career planning and with their various housing options. It is a really important program that backs in young people. Initially, the state government funded the program with some \$37.2 million. My understanding is that some 330 young people have been supported. This further investment of \$46.3 million will allow us to expand that service and ensure that any young person, wherever they live in the state, will be able to be supported through this critically important program.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the actual demand for this service?

Ms S.E. WINTON: We have had high interest in the program. Some 70 per cent of children in care have opted into the program, with 95 per cent of participants retained in the program. In terms of providing a bit of scale and context to it, approximately 300 young people exit the care system in any one year. This investment will allow us to support them, no matter where they live.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there a commensurate increase in both metropolitan and regional areas? Is the minister able to advise the breakdown of numbers in both those areas?

[3.00 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: As part of our 2021 election commitment, we fully rolled out the program across the state, which has seen grant agreements with nine Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and three community service organisations to support its delivery. I want to be clear that all young people who leave care will be able to access it no matter where they live.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have any sort of breakdown of regional and metro numbers?

Ms S.E. WINTON: It is a voluntary program and I am advised that, up until this point, it is about 90 per cent of young people leaving care in the metropolitan area and around 60 per cent of regional young people. That is not because the services are not there. That is just the young people who are choosing to participate in the program.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Budget paper No 3 refers to the funding covering ongoing administration costs. Does the minister have a rundown of the administration costs?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Mr Whitehouse to give the member that detail.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Thank you, member. There are three FTE associated with the administration. That relates to paying the Staying On subsidy or the housing allowance, for which Communities has paid out about \$1.3 million to children who are staying on with their carers or transitioning to housing. There is also the ongoing program management, contract management and implementation.

Dr K. STRATTON: I refer to page 504 of budget paper No 2 and the ongoing initiatives listed under the spending changes. There is a line item for foster and family carer support services. Could the minister tell us what supports are being offered to Western Australia's foster and family carers to ensure that they can continue to support vulnerable young people in our communities?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for Nedlands for the question. I want to acknowledge not only her advocacy while she has been a member of Parliament, but also her previous life as a social worker. It is really great to have her as a parliamentary colleague with her expertise. Before I talk about some of the support services, of course, Home Stretch, by extension, is also providing supports for foster carers to encourage them and to financially support them to keep supporting young people. We know the cost of living is challenging for everyone and we do not want financial challenges to be a reason for foster carers not being able to support a young person. Keeping those relationships going is a really important part of Home Stretch.

As the minister, one of my key priorities has been to recognise the important work that foster carers do, to celebrate them and to appreciate the role they play. Of course, we can always do with more foster carers. It is really important that we continue the work of promoting the important difference that can be made in someone's life by foster carers opening their hearts and homes to a young child or an older child in need. We need to keep recruiting new foster carers, but we also absolutely need to keep supporting our existing foster carers so that they can continue to do their important work with vulnerable children. In 2023, we launched *Who can say OK in WA?* to assist foster and family carers to feel confident and supported in making decisions for children and young people in care. It is not easy to be a parent and it is much harder caring for another's child. I cannot imagine how difficult it is to make those decisions sometimes. It is important to provide supports for that important work. In 2023, we launched the "Become a foster carer: Make a difference to a child's life" campaign. I am happy that it has more than doubled the application numbers from the year prior. We are starting to see people contemplating making a contribution by supporting a vulnerable person in their homes.

In January 2024, we made the cost-of-living announcement for a one-off payment to not only foster carers and family carers, but also, importantly—I know it is an area the member for Nedlands is particularly interested in—grandcarers. We provided \$500 for the first child in care and \$250 for each additional child. There was a great uptake of that. Some 5 000 families benefited from that cost-of-living support, particularly at the beginning of the school year when it can be really challenging to budget for all the extra costs. The 5 000 households that benefited from the payment equate to supporting 8 000 children and young people. The 2024–25 budget continues to invest in foster and family carers with \$17 million in funding for support services like carer advocacy information and support, with an annual \$273 000 top-up to the existing recurrent budget of \$910 000. OurSPACE WA is so important to the continuation and expansion of services in community sector organisations, including Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, which until now were not eligible to receive counselling support.

It is really important that we support our foster carers so they can be the best supports for vulnerable children. The funding in this year's budget is also for family support services so we can maintain the current service delivery to provide in-home practical support for carers across the state. That could be things like providing information on how adverse childhood experiences affect children and how to support them. It is very important to remember that many young people come to foster families with trauma and we need to be able to support those foster families to understand that trauma and how to support young people. We need to make sure that we build strong support networks and links to the community. We also need to assist foster carers in supporting a child's ongoing connection to their birth parents and culture. I think foster carers, family carers and grandcarers are the true angels in our community. I think sometimes people have a stereotypical view of what a foster carer looks like. We have many foster carers who take on different roles, whether it is emergency relief or respite relief. There are lots of different ways people can make contributions as foster carers. The stereotypical notion that they take on responsibility for a child from birth to 18 years is not the case for all foster carers. There are many ways people can contemplate supporting our vulnerable children and young people.

[3.10 pm]

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 137 of budget paper No 3. The notation at the top of the page states that \$17 million has been allocated to support the continuation and expansion of foster care supports across the state. How much of that \$17 million relates to the expansion of foster carer supports? Is it new money in addition to what they already receive, or does it partly exist?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said during my answer to the member for Nedlands' question, the \$17 million reflects additional funding so the department can continue to deliver the foster and family carer support services, which

includes things such as carer advocacy and information support, to give that top-up of \$273 000 to the existing \$910 000 recurrent spend a year. That will enable OurSPACE to fund the continuation and expansion of those services to continue work in the community with foster carers and the family carer support service to maintain current service delivery. It is a whole range of things. I will ask Mr Whitehouse to elaborate on what that \$17 million looks like and how it will support our foster carers.

Mr B. Whitehouse: These vital and important services for carers were implemented as a result of the Foster Care Refresh reform after consulting with hundreds of carers across the state about what is working, what is not working and what we can improve. These things have been tested over the years since 2021 and were evaluated last year. The evaluation showed that they were very effective, particularly the elements of emotional and practical support and skill support for carers in being able to sustain care arrangements, particularly family care arrangements. One of the recommendations or learnings is around the importance of advocacy for foster carers. That has been provided with several extra FTE for independent advocacy for foster carers when they might need support that is independent of the department or a community service organisation. The other growth is from OurSPACE, which is a counselling and practical support for what was initially just Department of Communities carers and general foster carers. That has grown as a result of this year's budget into the 20 per cent of children who are living in community sector organisations or approved care organisation arrangements.

Ms M. BEARD: Is the minister able to advise how many children are in foster care at the moment and how many families are currently approved as foster carers?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I can advise that as of 21 May, 5 319 children were in care and the number of households with foster family and special guardianship orders is 3 263.

Ms M. BEARD: Are there any foster children whose whereabouts are currently unknown by the department?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As of 21 May, two young people were unaccounted for—in contact; five young people were unaccounted for—not in contact; and one young person was missing. I would like to make a couple of additional comments in that regard. As I said, the total number of kids in care is 5 300. It is always a very tiny percentage of young people who are unaccounted for at any one point in time.

Ms M. BEARD: How long has the young person been missing for?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As of 21 May, the one young person had been missing for five days.

Ms M. BEARD: Have there been any complaints of abuse against foster carers? Have any incidents been reported in which children in foster care have suffered abuse?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Is that a new question?

The CHAIR: I think it is.

Ms M. BEARD: It is in relation to foster carers.

The CHAIR: Minister, I think you can deal with it.

Ms S.E. WINTON: So, is it back to foster carers?

The CHAIR: Yes. We could make it a new question.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Is it a fresh question on foster carers, chair?

The CHAIR: It is a further question, but because the initial question was quite generic, I think we can fit it under that.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Okay. I want to clarify that. In answering the question, I do not want to make an implication that there is some sort of abuse occurring around the statistics for unaccounted children.

The CHAIR: I think it is separate in that context.

Ms S.E. WINTON: From time to time there will be allegations. The department takes such allegations seriously and they would be fully investigated. Certainly, I urge anyone to come forward if they have specific allegations. I might ask the director general to explain the procedure when that does occur.

Mr M. Rowe: The first comment I would make is that we do everything we possibly can to make sure that children in care are in a safe placement. The vast majority of children are in placements with family but, regardless, we make sure that carers have a working with children check, and that is a pretty exhaustive process. We put general foster carers through a pretty exhaustive process to make sure that it will be safe for children. Obviously, community service organisation staff and associated carers go through a similar rigorous process. My first point is that we try everything possible to make sure that children go into a safe place in the first instance. As the minister said, if there are allegations, we take them very seriously. Depending on the nature of the allegation, we may take immediate action to remove children from a placement, but all allegations are investigated and, depending on their nature, they may also be referred to the police.

Ms M. BEARD: Of those foster carers, how many have been relieved of their duties for whatever reason?

The CHAIR: That is a bit general. In one context, the member is talking about abuse and then, more generally, the member is talking about foster carers being relieved. The member needs to be more specific. Just to make it specific, the member wants to know about allegations of abuse, not more generally—for example, removal for ill-health reasons or other things.

[3.20 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: Okay. Can I ask the member to repeat the question?

Ms M. BEARD: I would like to know how many carers, if any, have been relieved of foster care duties as a result of abuse or —

The CHAIR: Allegations.

Ms M. BEARD: — unworkable circumstances.

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said, I think there are 3 000-odd foster carers in the system at any one point. For a variety of reasons, some of them choose not to continue to be foster carers. I am not sure whether I have that specific information available for the member.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to significant issue 10, “Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence”, on page 506 of budget paper No 2. How many times has the Family and Domestic Violence Taskforce met since its inception in September 2023?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The member would know that the taskforce was set up by the government in September and concluded recently with the system reform plan, which was adopted by the government and is being supported through the state budget to the tune of \$96.4 million. I am advised that the taskforce met on six occasions. A number of meetings, workshops and consultations were held outside of the six meetings of the taskforce proper, so to speak.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister confirm how many times the taskforce has met? Are the minutes of those meetings publicly available?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said in my previous answer, the taskforce met six times and conducted numerous consultations and workshops outside of those six meeting times. The work of the taskforce has now concluded, with its system reform plan being endorsed by the government. It has committed to implement the plan, which is publicly available.

Ms L. METTAM: Have any recommendations been made by the taskforce that have not been adopted by the government?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am advised that the answer is no; all the agreed actions are in the system reform plan.

Ms L. METTAM: I understand that at the summit, which I believe triggered the taskforce, there was a discussion about a specialist police unit.

The CHAIR: You are getting a bit away from it.

Ms L. METTAM: It was a recommendation, which I thought was going to be part of the taskforce. Where did that fit in?

The CHAIR: I think it fits into another portfolio, but the minister may be able to answer it.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Dr Leggett to elaborate a bit more. The summit talks about what the member might remember and what some people described as a one-page ask of things that the sector was looking for. Two of the key asks were to establish a taskforce, which the Premier agreed to. It resulted in the leaders of agencies, all the directors general, the Under Treasurer and the Commissioner of Police fully participating in the taskforce and the development of this system reform plan.

Another key ask of the taskforce was the establishment of a lived experience entity, which we have also committed to through \$1.9 million of funding to ensure that we move ahead with that. The taskforce’s deliberations fully considered everything that was discussed at the summit, which is reflected in the system reform plan that was endorsed by all members of the taskforce. As I said, it has now been endorsed by the government, as reflected by the \$96 million investment to move forward and ensure that the system reform plan is put in place.

Ms L. METTAM: Was “Lynn’s Law” considered by the taskforce?

The CHAIR: Minister, you can judge better whether that relates to budget items.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy to comment on this because I am very happy to say that yes, the taskforce did consider a disclosure scheme as part of the system reform plan, which is publicly available and might be of some interest to the member opposite.

Apologies, Chair, I got my Lyns confused. I understand that the member opposite was referring to police response times.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes, in relation to family and domestic violence.

The CHAIR: All right. Well, we cannot go there. This is the wrong portfolio. In fact, I chaired part of those portfolios. No-one bothered to ask about that.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I refer the minister to the line item “Earlier Intervention and Family Support Services” under the service summary on page 509 of budget paper No 2. Given the over-representation of Aboriginal families in out-of-home care, can the minister give us some information on how the Cook government is supporting more Aboriginal families to stay together?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for the question. He is right; Aboriginal children are over-represented in the out-of-home care system. Our government will continue to invest to ensure that we do better. We prioritise keeping children safe at home because we know that children thrive at home with their families and a cultural connection. Through our focus on out-of-home care recommissioning, which will see six Aboriginal-controlled organisations doing important work to ensure cultural connection for young kids in care and to support reunification, we will continue to invest in earlier intervention and family support services because we do not want young kids coming into care in the first place.

Since 2017, we have supported more families to stay together and for children to be reunified and return home safely. Our strategy provides culturally responsive earlier targeted intervention and prioritises at-risk Aboriginal families to reduce that over-representation I spoke of.

Communities, in partnership with a range of community service sector partners, delivers some of these EIFS services, including the family support networks and the Aboriginal In-Home Support Service, which is a culturally responsive intensive in-home support program delivered by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. When we think about it, it is about going in and supporting families to ensure that children are safe so that decisions do not have to be made to remove children. We know that it is having great results, along with the regional service model—a newly implemented service developed for locations in the East Kimberley, the Pilbara and the south west—and of course the intensive family support services. Under our strategy, 85 per cent of children who were referred to that Aboriginal in-home support service in particular have remained safely at home after 12 months and about 80 per cent of those who were referred to the intensive family support service remained safely at home after 12 months. We know that early intervention is the key. If it were not for those early interventions, it might have been a very different outcome for those young children. We will continue to invest in programs and initiatives that support families and children staying together.

In this year’s budget is \$5.8 million for the continuation of the Aboriginal family-led decision-making pilot and what is known as AROs—Aboriginal responsible organisations. In regard to the Aboriginal family-led decision-making program, I have seen Streeties, which is a great Aboriginal community-controlled organisation in Geraldton, work with families and children to ensure that they understand and are supported in how they can make their homes safer for their children and divert children from having to go into care. The ARO is an important program, but the focus is slightly different whereby when a decision is made that a child has to go into care, the ARO does important work so that the placements are culturally sensitive and the ARO supports the family to ensure that the places the children or young people are put in are culturally responsive and that the families support our young people. We know that if we keep kids connected with their families, we will have a much better chance of reunification, ultimately, down the line.

The budget also has a two-year extension—I am really happy about that, and I know that the Attorney General is too—to fund Dandjoo Bidi-Ak, which is the therapeutic family court. I have made a couple of visits there. The work that the people in that space are doing to improve outcomes for Aboriginal families involved in court proceedings is quite extraordinary. I am really pleased to see funding in this year’s budget to continue that work. Early intervention is the key, and early intervention through Aboriginal-led responses is absolutely key to ensuring that we keep young children out of care and that they remain connected and safe with family.

[3.35 pm]

The CHAIR: I might indicate that there will be a changing of the guard in the chair at four o’clock so we might schedule a small comfort break then. Would that suit you, minister?

Ms S.E. WINTON: That is fine.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to the service summary on page 509 of budget paper No 2. Line item 5 is “Child Protection Assessments and Investigations”. I am wondering about the discrepancy between the actual expenditure and the increase in the budgeted amount for the assessments. What is the reason for that?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Can the member repeat the question?

Ms M. BEARD: I am wondering about the variance in the budgeted amount of \$99 857 000 for 2023–24 and the estimated actual amount that jumped to \$103 040 000 in 2023–24. It then jumps to \$111 309 000 in 2024–25. What is the reason behind those discrepancies?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Mr Wayne Millen to provide some detail.

Mr W. Millen: The movement that the member refers to is primarily attributed to the net impact of several items. There is an overhead allocation whereby the overall overhead costs of the entire agency are allocated across our services. Some of the contributors to that include that a non-government human services sector indexation uplift was applied. There was also an uplift provided for our lease costs for the Government Regional Officers' Housing and there were variations to government office accommodation leases. Additional funding was provided for those things that are allocated across our services. A general consumer price index increase was also applied as part of an annual cost-and-demand update that is provided to us by government.

Ms M. BEARD: Does that include the caseworker FTEs?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy to provide an answer, but I am advised that Mr Millen will need a bit more time. I am happy to come back to that if the member wants to ask another one.

The CHAIR: Is this a new question or a further question? Is it still on this line item?

Ms M. BEARD: Yes. It follows on from my caseworker question.

Assuming that the caseworkers are included in this amount and there is a shortfall, which the minister was explaining to us before, will there be an increase in this amount due to the fact that more caseworkers will be needed to come on board?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Thank you for your patience. I am advised that in the 2023–24 budget an additional \$106 million was allocated to child protection services over the period 2022–23 to 2026–27. The \$2.3 million uplift in 2024–25 is anticipated to support an additional 23 FTE.

Ms M. BEARD: If there will be an additional 23 FTE, can the minister advise me what the ratio of caseworkers to children needs to be? How many children can each caseworker have?

[3.40 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: More specifically, I think the member is trying to ask how many cases for each FTE. Broadly speaking, I will provide some generic information about child protection staff caseloads, which is guided by and in accordance with the 2007 Western Australia Industrial Relations Commission order. In that respect, caseloads in WA over the past 12 months have predominantly remained within the agreed limits set out in the industrial relations order. My understanding is that it is a limit of 15 cases.

Ms M. BEARD: Are there currently any caseworkers who have a load over and above 15 cases?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The data provided to me, which is relevant for 5 May, is that the statewide average case load is 10.85.

Ms M. BEARD: Am I hearing that no-one has more than 15 cases at the moment?

Ms S.E. WINTON: No. In some circumstances, there are caseworkers with more than 15 cases because the average is 10.85. There are currently no caseworkers with more than 18 cases, which is the upper limit for senior workers. There are 130 caseworkers with more than 15 cases, which is within the limit and allowable because they are senior caseworkers.

Ms M. BEARD: Sorry, what was that?

Ms S.E. WINTON: It is 113 caseworkers.

The CHAIR: Is it 113 or 130?

Ms S.E. WINTON: It is 113.

Ms M. BEARD: Just so that I understand, are there 113 caseworkers who have between 15 and 18 cases under their care?

Ms S.E. WINTON: That is correct.

Ms L. METTAM: For the children in care who have caseworkers, how many have had more than one caseworker?

The CHAIR: That is going to be difficult to answer, minister, is it not?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes. I am not sure I can answer that individually, but I will seek some advice in a moment, chair. I would say, as I have previously stated, in an ideal world, we would love for one caseworker to be with each individual child for their entire journey through the out-of-home care system. It is like many parents who want the same teacher for the entire year that their child is in the classroom. However, there are a number of circumstances as to why that is not the case. Child protection staff transfer, move, or leave the system. In some instances, it is the children and families who move, and it is a necessity that the caseworker changes. There are a bunch of variables outside of our control.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister providing an answer?

The CHAIR: The minister said it was difficult to do, and she is unable to do it because the factors were —

Ms L. METTAM: I thought she was referring —

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said before, there are a variety of reasons why there might be more than one caseworker in a child's or young person's out-of-home care journey. It varies. Broadly, we are talking about some 5 300 children in care, and I am not able to reasonably provide that information.

The CHAIR: I am sorry. My intervention might have been unhelpful. I think the question is: are there records for the number of kids who have changed child protection workers?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Of course there are records. Each individual child or young person in care has a significant database of records of their journey in the out-of-home care system. That data is not aggregated and is not able to be collated in an efficient way to answer the kind of question that is being posed to me.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to provide that information via supplementary information?

The CHAIR: She just said no. It is not readily accessible to be collated. That was the answer. I think that means no.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: With reference to that answer, is that not something that the department and minister would be interested in to understand whether there is high turnover of caseworkers, or children who have had a significant number of caseworkers, outside some of those variables? I think that kind of assessment has not just been pulled out of our back pocket; it gets raised regularly with every member of Parliament that it is sometimes a revolving door. I would think the minister would want to be able to assess that to see whether there are issues that could be addressed as a result of understanding that data.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Like I said previously, in a perfect world, there would be one caseworker for the entirety of a young person's life. As I have previously said in this place, and outside, a whole range of reasons and factors contribute to changing a young person's caseworker. Notwithstanding that, I appreciate the comment the member is trying to make. It is of interest to the department and it is managed at the district level. All I am suggesting is that, from my perspective, it is unreasonable to ask the Department of Communities to try to aggregate that information across some 5 300 children in care to provide that level of detail.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I have a new question. I refer to page 504 under spending changes and ongoing initiatives. About two-thirds down the page is the line item "Community Gardens Grants Program". Can the minister provide some additional information about the community gardens grants program and detail some of the projects that will benefit from this investment?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for Mirrabooka for the question. I am sure everyone would agree that community gardens are a really cool thing in our community. They really do bring people together. It has been quite interesting when I travel across the state to see the different approaches communities have to community gardens. I recently visited a garden in the member for Scarborough's electorate. The kinds of people who were interested in participating in that garden included a lot who had downsized and did not have a traditional garden but still wanted to be part of that experience. When I have visited Albany or other places, it is a different cohort of people who value community gardens. What we know is that the gardens keep people together, engaged and active.

The member would also know that we provide grants of up to \$10 000 to establish or develop those community gardens around the state. They are very often overly subscribed because many great local communities want to establish community gardens or keep building on what they have already established in their community. In May, we announced that an additional investment of \$300 000-odd would be allocated to allow an additional 35 community garden projects to receive funding. That is on top of the 29 organisations that received their funding through the normal grants process in December 2023. In that regard, it brings the total number of community gardens that have received funding in 2023–24 to 64. They are available to incorporated not-for-profit community organisations as well as local community authorities. A couple of examples: there was \$10 000 for Alzheimer's WA to develop Don's Cottage Community Garden in Albany, which will provide social engagement and activity for people living with dementia and their carers; \$10 000 to establish a Vasse community garden as a central hub for the community; and \$8 800 for the Bremer Bay Community Resource and Visitors Centre to establish a community garden. As I said, I was recently at the coastal community garden in North Beach, and it has great plans for the plot of land that it has been allocated by the City of Stirling. It is well located between the footy ovals and the tennis courts. I can really see that this money will support it to bring its aspirations to reality. There will be a new round of this funding later on in the year, and I hope that others will also seek this funding to support them in the important work they do in communities. Sometimes, they are growing some really bizarre and strange things. When I was with the member for Darling Range in Baldivis, they were growing pigface, which is actually edible. I played with it as a child, but I had never eaten it before that visit. It is quite nice.

[3.50 pm]

The CHAIR: Gosh! That is a fun fact.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to paragraphs 10.4 to 10.7 on the bottom third of page 506, under the heading "Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence". Paragraph 10.4 notes "new refuge beds". I know that the minister knows that this is one of my pet questions. Will more or additional infrastructure be provided, particularly across the regions, not

only for women's refuges but also for men's refuges? That is a growing area. I have talked to a few men on the street who have said, "If I could have got out, I would have left and gone to a men's refuge." That is obviously going to help quell the situation. Also, some children are, maybe for two or three nights in a row, continually wandering around. My question about those refuge beds is whether that is something that will be looked at.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for the question. She is right: crisis refuge support is a critical and really important part of keeping women and children safe. I acknowledge her comments about men having a safe place to go to as well, specifically when we are talking about men being not the victims of family and domestic violence but the perpetrators and wanting to try to break the cycle and move somewhere else. The Breathing Space investments in Maylands, Calista and South Hedland are residential programs that allow men to get that support. They not only get somewhere to stay but also can participate in a nationally recognised, innovative program that supports perpetrators to change their ways. This government has made significant investments in crisis support since coming to government in 2017. We now fund 44 refuges and safe houses right across WA, with half of them based in the regions. Since 2017, we have had a 27 per cent uplift in WA, from 224 units to 284 units available. Of course, part of the \$160 million or so that we announced since November last year is a significant further investment in increasing that capacity, which will see an additional 72 units brought into the system. Part of that, of course, was rebuilding and tripling the size of the Stirling Women's Centre, providing operational funding for Ruah Community Services' new refuge in central Perth and extending the funding to Munda Mia Therapeutic Community.

Ms M. BEARD: Obviously, the minister is very aware of the patch I live in. I know that Broome has something in train for that area. Meekatharra, Mt Magnet and all those areas are strongly affected by this. Are there any refuges of any description in the pipeline in any of those spaces, including a men's refuge in Carnarvon? I know the women's refuge in Carnarvon is already full. Are there any plans to grow that in the near future?

Ms S.E. WINTON: For our investment in family and domestic violence, I will acknowledge that there is always more to do. There is always more to do, and we will continue our record investment in family and domestic violence. We have made an investment in crisis accommodation, as I described, and we also want to focus on and have invested in expanding the rapid rehousing program, which supports women out of crisis accommodation and into transitional housing. Also in this budget, we are focused on ensuring that we expand the Safe at Home program, which is being rolled out in many locations throughout the state, including at Kununurra, Port Hedland and Kalgoorlie. It already operates in Perth, the wheatbelt, the south west, Katanning and Fitzroy Crossing. When we talk about the whole suite of investments that we are making in family and domestic violence, we do not want women and children to leave their homes in the first place if it is safe to stay. We need to do everything we can to stop the violence in the first place, so, if possible, women and children stay home, where they deserve to be.

Ms M. BEARD: To keep them safe in their own homes, are liquor-free homes used regularly? In some towns I go to, the house is alcohol free, so if the partner or the perpetrator comes back and any alcohol is involved, they are not allowed in the house. The police can come and pick them up. Is the government using that tool for some of these safe spaces?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I think liquor might be in somebody else's portfolio. I seek the chair's guidance.

The CHAIR: I would have thought there might be an interface between justice and maybe police. It would be a condition of bail or whatever.

Ms L. METTAM: In terms of emergency responses, I understand overwhelmingly —

The CHAIR: Is this the same line item? We are looking at new refuge beds. That is how we started.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes. Do men have any participation at all in these services or are they dedicated women's services?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The ones I mentioned are dedicated women's and children's services. As I said, also, when we talk about the perpetrator programs that I mentioned in answers to previous questions and to this one, the critical element is that they are residential programs that not only provide accommodation but also engage men in behaviour change programs, which we know are successful.

The CHAIR: I indicated that we might have a comfort break, so we will have a short break now.

Meeting suspended from 4.00 to 4.12 pm

[Mr S.J. Price took the chair.]

Ms L. METTAM: On page 506, paragraph 10.7 refers to the perpetrator programs. How many men are involved in the perpetrator programs at this time?

The CHAIR: Minister.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Welcome to the division, chair.

As I said previously, perpetrator responses are a really important part of this government's response to family and domestic violence, because we need to stop the violence before it begins. A really critical part of that work is having programs that can challenge perpetrators and demand change of them. Various services that I described are

being funded in this year's budget. That includes the Breathing Space facilities in South Hedland, Calista and Maylands as well as the behaviour change programs that have been announced in Bunbury, Albany and Northam. It depends on the kind of services that are being offered by the various programs. In that regard, I am happy for Dr Leggett to provide a little more detail.

Dr N. Leggett: In Western Australia, funded through the Department of Communities we have three Breathing Space programs. They operate with up to 12 rooms each. On any given night, 12 men per program can be accommodated in those Breathing Space programs. We fund five community-based men's behaviour change programs. They run group-based interventions. Any one group can have up to 12 men in it, and they may run multiple groups in a week. We also have individual men's workers attached to the family and domestic violence response teams in five locations. They provide intervention to a much larger number of men, because it is more one-to-one work following a police call-out. We also have Safe at Home perpetrator response, which also has a higher volume of response on a one-to-one basis, and we operate the Men's Domestic Violence Helpline, which takes calls 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That is our existing base of programs. It does not include the new funding, which the minister has spoken about, for the three new regional community-based programs that are to come online later this year.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the Men's Domestic Violence Helpline for perpetrators?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Sorry; I do not understand the question.

Ms L. METTAM: The adviser referred to a family and domestic violence line for men.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Sorry; it is line as in telephone line. I thought the member meant a line in the budget.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes, I can understand that! Is that correct?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: How long has that helpline been going for, and what is the take-up or rate of usage? Can the minister give me an understanding of how often it is used?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am advised that that helpline has been operating since the late 1990s and supports men who reach out who want support in changing their behaviour. I am advised that we do not have information readily available on the number of people who use that helpline.

Ms L. METTAM: Is that information recorded? Would the department be able to provide that information by way of supplementary information?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The information is not available to me right now. Can I get back to the member when I have the information?

Ms L. METTAM: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Is that an informal arrangement?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes; I would like to see the information first.

Ms L. METTAM: How many perpetrators have been engaged in the Breathing Space program over the last financial year?

[4.20 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: As Dr Leggett said before, up to 12 men live in residential care as part of the perpetrator behaviour program at any given time. I do not have the figures in front of me in terms of the overall number of men who have been supported in the program. That would vary. Having spent time at the Maylands Breathing Space location, I know that some men stay for a limited period, some self-select to disengage from the program and others stay for longer periods. One man I spoke to was there for the second time. I do not have that information, but I can say that up to 12 men can be accommodated in each of these locations.

Ms L. METTAM: Is this information recorded; and, if so, is the minister able to provide it by way of supplementary information?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said, those records are kept but I do not have them on me at the moment. I am happy for the member to put the question on notice and we will get the information to her.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister give me an indication of what the demand has been like for Breathing Space?

The CHAIR: Member, you are drifting away from budget-related questions. You have a bit of latitude as the minister seems happy to respond.

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I have previously indicated, there is demand and a need for perpetrator programs of all descriptions right throughout the state. The program at these three sites is very successful. That is why I am really happy that there has been an uplift to these services to ensure they can keep operating and supporting men in the important work of changing their behaviour.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to child protection and family support on page 524 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. The second-last item under that heading is Target 120. Funding for that is increasing in 2024–25 but then it seems that the program will suddenly come to an end in 2025–26. Can the minister confirm whether that is the case?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As members would know, Target 120 is a critical program that has at its heart a focus on intervening early to support young people and direct them away from future engagement with the justice system. We know that it is working. The original investment was an election commitment. The program has now been rolled out to 20 locations around the state and, importantly, works with young people at risk of offending. I have had the opportunity to visit many of those locations and I speak regularly with the service providers, including the many Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that do this intensive work with young people. I have said previously, and want to highlight again, that each location has the capacity to work with up to 10 young people. Of course, the program helps not just those 10 young people but their siblings and families as well. It is a significant piece of intervention and support that is being provided to young people and their families to deal with underlying issues, whether it is substance abuse, domestic violence, trauma, mental health issues or poor attendance at school. I am very proud of the Target 120 program and the difference it is making. We know that nearly half of participants are not having any future contact with the police. Early intervention is the key to solving complex issues for disengaged young people in communities. We will continue to back those programs.

Ms M. BEARD: What measures are used to determine the success of it? What is it measured against?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Like many or most or all—I think it is all—government programs, the Target 120 program is evaluated. There was an evaluation of Target 120 back in 2019, which served to provide us with important information to make some changes and to continue to roll out the program in the 20 locations. Likewise, another evaluation of the Target 120 program has been undertaken and that report is with government for its consideration at the moment.

Ms M. BEARD: Will that report be released?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The government is considering that report and that will influence the way in which we continue to roll out Target 120. An important part of Target 120, of course, is the connection between the various service providers and government agencies to do that wraparound work with young people. A critical part of the Target 120 program is that we have been working together with Treasury to assess the program and its value in assisting to divert young people from having interactions with police.

Ms M. BEARD: Just to clarify, will the outcomes and measurements in that report not be released?

Ms S.E. WINTON: That evaluation is being considered by government. That is appropriate because it will guide us in terms of any changes that we make to the program.

Ms M. BEARD: Are the 20 locations that the minister mentioned fully subscribed in terms of both resources to run them and the number of people in the program?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said previously, we are operating in 20 locations at the moment. Each program in each location has the capacity to work with 10 young people at a time. As of 31 March, there were 169 active young people in the program. Of course, that process also assists some 669 family members and siblings. At each site, young people are provided with intensive one-on-one support to develop a plan that is appropriate to their needs and ensures that they will get the support and intervention they need to be able to fully engage with the community, whether through being engaged back in school or supporting them into a traineeship or the workplace. It is a very individualised process for each individual young person in each place.

Ms M. BEARD: Is it fully resourced in terms of the caseworkers for each of the Target 120 programs in each of those locations? Are there no vacancies in the people to run the programs?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Vacancies in terms of?

Ms M. BEARD: In terms of the people who are running the programs. Are there any vacancies in FTE to run the Target 120 program?

[4.30 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: The program is fully funded in those 20 locations to work with 10 young people at a time. From time to time in a particular location, a service provider may have vacancies within their organisation and they do everything they can to fill those positions. At the moment, most of the organisations have their full contingent of FTE that is provided as part of the funding as we currently have 169 young people actively engaged in the program.

Ms M. BEARD: I am trying to understand whether there are some vacancies in some locations.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy for Mr Whitehouse to elaborate a little bit on the program.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Thank you, member and thank you, minister. For Target 120, as the member knows, young people are selected through a cross-section of data from the Department of Education, child protection and police. That means a range of children and their families are always actively being worked with, as well as what we call

open cases. Although we are currently working with 169 young people, something like 177-odd open families are ready to come in that we are working with. There are 20 sites, which have been rolled out for some time. They are staffed and in operation.

Ms M. BEARD: Are those 20 locations fully staffed at the moment?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I understand what the member is asking. Like I was trying to say in my answer, I am not sure whether this is helpful. Particular service providers, whether they deliver Target 120, Breathing Space or any other government service, from time to time will have staff changes or vacancies that they have to manage internally, but they are still able to deliver the services they have been contracted to deliver.

Ms M. BEARD: Going back to my initial question about the funding not going beyond 2025–26, is that in line with a review?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I have a big focus on what is being implemented and ensuring that when we invest, we do so well. As I said before, Target 120 has had great success with nearly half of young people not engaging with police contact after exiting the program. I will continue to focus on programs for early intervention and supporting young people to take the right path. In doing so, I am also keen to learn of the successes of the program to ensure that any future investment is really impactful.

Ms M. BEARD: To clarify, there is no funding past that point in time because the minister wants to assess it and work through what has worked and has not worked, and she will determine that at the time?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 506 and paragraph 10.4, which refers to new refuge beds. How much has the government provided for new refuge beds in this budget?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I think I have answered this question before but I am happy to do so again. As I previously said, our government funds some 44 refuges and safe houses throughout Western Australia. Half of those are in the regions. Since coming to office, we have increased the capacity by some 60 refuge units, which is just shy of a 27 per cent increase in crisis accommodation. In the latest announcements of funding from November, through the taskforce to now, the \$160 million of funding will see the delivery of 77 additional units, which are currently in the pipeline. That includes \$22.6 million to rebuild and triple the size of the Stirling Women's Refuge and \$6.6 million to support the operational funding of Ruah Community Service's new refuge in central Perth. It will extend funding to the Munda Mia facility, as well as support rapid rehousing and Safe at Home programs throughout the state, as I mentioned previously.

Ms L. METTAM: Apologies if the minister has already provided this answer. How many women have sought assistance from a refuge over the past 12 months?

Ms S.E. WINTON: On any given night, 284 units are available for women seeking crisis support. By units, we mean accommodation available also for children or siblings.

Ms L. METTAM: I am asking about the demand and how many women have sought assistance from a refuge. Can the minister also give an indication of what it might have been in the previous year? I assume the minister would have that information.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy for Dr Leggett to provide some further information.

Dr N. Leggett: All our refuges and safe houses record their client information on an information platform called the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform. It is managed by the commonwealth government through the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. It produces regular reports, which are available in the public domain, related to client-supported refuges.

Ms L. METTAM: Given that, does the minister have that information or is she able to provide information on the demand and to what extent it has grown for these services over the last 12 months?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will generally say, further to Dr Leggett's advice, that it is available in the public realm. I will acknowledge that family and domestic violence continues to be a scourge in our society. Women are seeking support in a variety of areas, including crisis accommodation and supports in other ways. This government will continue its record funding of not only crisis accommodation and perpetrator responses as we discussed earlier, but also the important piece around primary prevention. I will always urge a woman to come forward and seek assistance.

[4.40 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister aware of how many women seeking assistance at a refuge have been turned away over the last 12 months? Is that recorded?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I know that family and domestic violence continues to be at unacceptable levels, and this government will continue to provide record funding into all streams of its FDV response. There is always more to do. In terms of the supports available for women, our crisis support is part of a broad range of supports that are available for women seeking assistance in fleeing family and domestic violence.

Ms L. METTAM: Given the significance and importance of this issue, does the department keep a record of how many women are turned away due to a lack of capacity in the system?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am well aware of the significance of the issue of family and domestic violence, member, and so is the government; it has been since it came to government in 2017. It is a priority of our government. We have made a significant record investment of some \$47 million since coming to government. That is not only helping many, many women to escape violence, but also ensuring that, wherever possible, they can stay in their homes. We have never shied away from the fact that there is more to do. We will continue to do more, and we will continue to listen to the sector about what our response should be.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the department record the gap? Is that even a measure?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The answer about where that data is held was provided by either me or Dr Leggett. I can assure the member that I am well aware of the significant issue of family and domestic violence in this community. We will continue our record investment in a range of areas, including crisis accommodation, as is reflected in the services and the 27 per cent increase in funding, which I explained before, since 2017. Importantly, since November, this will allow 77 more units to come online.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister referred to Dr Leggett's response, but she referred to the number of women who are using these services. I am asking: does the department record the number of women who are turned away?

Ms S.E. WINTON: What I meant by saying that Dr Leggett has provided that information is that the dataset she referred to is what we as a government use in determining our investments.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I refer to page 504 of budget paper No 2 and the spending changes, specifically the line item "Child Sexual Abuse Therapeutic Services and Indigenous Healing Services". Can the minister please explain how this funding will support existing services?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy to provide some information to the member. I want to acknowledge the member's advocacy on the really important area of providing support for children and young people who are victims of sexual abuse—he is quite an inspiration.

The Cook Labor government takes preventing and responding to sexual child abuse extremely seriously. In 2018, our government committed to implementing all the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The spending change in the 2024–25 budget reflects a 15 per cent uplift in the base funding for child sexual abuse therapeutic services, or CSATS as a lot of people know them, and, importantly, providing an uplift for Indigenous healing services to ensure a continuation of the contracts and to support stability in the sector. Our government contracts 13 CSATS and two Indigenous healing services across WA to provide support, counselling and therapeutic responses to children, young people and their families who are affected by child sexual abuse. Indigenous healing services respond to the unique needs of vulnerable Aboriginal kids and families by taking an Aboriginal perspective to health and wellbeing. The budget also includes recurrent funding of \$667 000 annually for the Kimberley Sexual Abuse Prevention and Support Service. It works closely with the Department of Communities, the Western Australia Police Force and the Kimberley joint response team when responding to disclosures of child sexual abuse and provides therapeutic counselling, interventions and support in East and West Kimberley and remote communities. Of course, these uplifts are important. The sector has advocated long and hard for these important uplifts so that it can continue to do its important work.

I put on the record that the delivery of our 2017 election commitment—the member for Bassendean was pivotal in this—resulted in legislation being passed to lift the statute of limitations for victims of child sexual abuse so they can pursue civil action. We have introduced the reportable conduct scheme, strengthened our working with children screening and implemented a series of activities to develop child safe organisations. This is important work. We know that as we heighten our response to keeping children safe, and rightly so, we also need to ensure that when children and families come forward to report that, we back and support the therapeutic services that are required to give them the opportunity to heal.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 524 and the line item "Regional Childcare", which is halfway down the page under "Community Services". Why does the allocated amount drop significantly over the years, with no allocation in 2025–26?

[4.50 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: Early childhood education is a really critical part of supporting children in our community, making sure that they develop in those early years. Early childhood education and care services are also critically important as they provide opportunities for parents, particularly mums, to return to work. We made an election commitment of \$5.1 million to support ECEC services, particularly in regional WA. Having visited many country towns, one of the key things people talk to me about is the provision of quality childcare services in their towns. That sector, like many other sectors, has real workforce challenges at the moment. It is critical that we continue to support them.

The first part of that \$5.1 million election commitment involved two rounds of applications. I think the third round has just closed. We sought applications for funding from local government authorities to provide support for early childhood education services in their towns. We distributed \$530 000 over the first two grant rounds. As I said, the third round has closed. We will be making some announcements about the successful local government authorities.

Generally speaking, those small shires and towns that were successful have been using the funds for accommodation and relocation subsidies for the educators coming to town. Others have chosen to use the money for professional development of existing staff and also for course costs for new trainees. The \$4.1 million was subject to a separate round that closed in November. I will be making an announcement on the investment around the state to further support those grassroots early childhood education operators in the regions.

It is not in my portfolio area but wherever I go, one of the key things that is also supported by the workforce and those early childhood education operators right around the state is the significant savings gained as a result of our fee-free TAFE courses, particularly for early childhood educators. It is not insignificant; we are talking about payments of up to \$10 000. All those people who want to undertake cert III or diploma courses in early childhood education can do so for free. Those two courses have seen the biggest uptakes of all the fee-free TAFE courses that are included. I encourage lots of people to continue to apply. As a former teacher, I can say that there is nothing better that people can do than go into the education sector.

Ms M. BEARD: Just to clarify, given the importance of regional childcare facilities and early education, is there no funding for regional child care in 2025–26?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said, this is a really important investment into regional child care. In particular, after announcing funding of \$4.1 million, the government sought submissions from organisations and operators right around the state on innovative ways they could network and support each other to build capacity. I look forward to announcing the results of that tender process soon. We will continue to work with the sector to determine what else we can do to support an absolutely essential service in every regional town—that is, good quality early childhood education services.

Ms M. BEARD: Notwithstanding that, I do not understand why there is a gap in 2025–26, which would stop the continuity of regional childcare services in some cases.

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said before, I will be announcing a specific grants program soon. We will consider what else we can do to support the early childhood education sector in the regions.

Ms M. BEARD: In my mind, there will be no funding for regional childcare support or regional childcare facilities in 2025–26.

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said, it is a bit like my answer to the question about Target 120 programs. I am really keen to see what projects and initiatives I will be announcing next week. We will give them an opportunity to roll out and learn from them. That will be the basis on which we will make investment decisions in the future. I want to see them operate so that we can be informed about future investments.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 520 of budget paper No 2. I would like some clarification on the line item under “Other” just over halfway down—“Safe Place—Youth Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Homelessness Program”. I am keen to know whether the amounts are for services or infrastructure. Looking at the numbers, it seems that they would potentially be for infrastructure.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Just to clarify, is the member talking about the line item “Safe Place—Youth Mental Health —

Ms M. BEARD: It is the health and alcohol and other drug homelessness program.

Ms S.E. WINTON: That comes under Minister Carey’s portfolio.

Ms M. BEARD: So there is no interface between them.

I refer to page 524 of budget paper No 2. Towards the bottom of the table is the line item “North West Aboriginal Housing Fund” and then “ACCO Aboriginal Employee Housing Grants Program”. Is that linked in any way to Communities? Is there any infrastructure in that that works with Communities?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Apologies again; it comes under Minister Carey’s portfolio.

Ms M. BEARD: I just wanted to ask whether Communities gets involved in the requirements of what those Aboriginal community-controlled organisations determine is needed.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes, Communities does get involved, but it is under the remit of Minister Carey, not me, so he would be able to answer that question. Communities is definitely involved.

Ms M. BEARD: Sorry, I have lost my place.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I know the feeling!

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to service 4, “Preventing and Responding to Family and Domestic Violence”, on page 509 of budget paper No 2. Given the significant concern that the minister has recognised, can she explain why funding for preventing and responding to family and domestic violence has fallen 22 per cent—from \$145 million in 2024–25 to \$112 million in 2027–28?

[5.00 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: I reject the notion that we are decreasing funding for the prevention of family and domestic violence. The variation that the member is talking about takes into account changes that will come about as a result of investments and contributions from the national partnership. Likewise, some of the investments that the member will see in this year's budget are time-specific in terms of making sure that we deliver on them. That will then determine future investments that we cannot put into the forward estimates until that important work has been done as part of the reform of the system.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the third line item of the service summary on page 509, "Earlier Intervention and Family Support Services". Can the minister advise why this funding is dropping? It is falling—not as far as the figure I mentioned previously—from \$127 million to \$125 million.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will give a similar response to the previous question. I can reassure members of our commitment to early intervention programs, particularly in child protection. As I have said previously, our announcements of funding investments are very much determined by the evaluation of the programs. Likewise, in this portfolio, whether it is Target 120, which I spoke about earlier, or other initiatives, we will be guided by their evaluation before we make those investments in the future. That does not take away from this being a priority area; it is a responsible way of investing in programs to ensure that we invest with impact.

Ms L. METTAM: I note that this funding is for early intervention and family support services. Is the minister able to provide information on what the take-up rate has been for those services or programs?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The early intervention and family support services to which the member referred is quite comprehensive in the kinds of initiatives and programs that it covers. It covers things like family support networks, Aboriginal in-home support services, intensive family support services and the regional service model. I am advised that from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, some 7 200 clients were supported by the family support network and 445 cases were supported by the intensive family support service. That is the service I referred to earlier whereby 80 per cent of children who were part of that service remained safely at home with their parents after 12 months, and 205 cases were supported by the Aboriginal in-home support service that I talked about earlier. That service is showing great success as well, in that 85 per cent of children whose families were referred to that Aboriginal in-home support service have remained safely at home with their parents after 12 months.

Dr K. STRATTON: I refer to the spending changes on page 504 of budget paper No 2 and the line item "16 Days in WA Community Grants Program" under the heading "New Initiatives". How does this program contribute to the prevention of family and domestic violence in our communities?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for the question and the opportunity to talk about a key part of our approach to tackling family and domestic violence. At its heart is getting everyone in the community to recognise that everyone needs to play their part. Last year the 16 Days in WA program was in its seventh year. This government started it as a public awareness campaign around family and domestic violence. Last year's theme was "Stopping Family and Domestic Violence: Play your part". The 16 Days in WA campaign is incredibly important. Each year we build on the success by building awareness and the conversations that are happening in every house around family and domestic violence. The campaign runs from 25 November, which, of course, is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, right through to 10 December. It is challenging to find 16 orange things to wear! Nevertheless, it does very well and is an important awareness campaign.

Many activities take place around the state over those 16 days, whether it is education sessions, morning teas and people getting together and having conversations, or an arts event. Importantly, last year we provided \$50 000 in grant funding so that we could encourage more localised activities around the state. The Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing received \$25 000. It administered a statewide community grants program to support organisations right around the state to hold events. Of course, \$25 000 went to Aboriginal Family Legal Services to support the ochre ribbon campaign during the 16 days. I attended many events as part of the 16 Days in WA campaign. It is a significant part of the calendar now and I know that plans are already underway to make it even bigger and better. By bigger and better, I mean that we need to do everything possible. A public education awareness program is a critical part of making everyone acknowledge that everyone has a part to play if we are to end the scourge of family and domestic violence.

Ms M. BEARD: Under the heading "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies" on page 524 is the line item "Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse". The funding significantly reduces in 2025–26 and does not appear in the forward estimates in 2026–27. Can the minister explain why there is no funding for that going forward?

[5.10 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I responded to a previous question, since 2008, our government has been committed to implementing the recommendations from the royal commission. An important key part of that royal commission was to provide child sexual abuse therapeutic services to children who have experienced sexual abuse. In this year's budget, 13 CSATS and two Indigenous healing services will receive an important uplift so that they continue that work. I might ask Ms Irwin to elaborate on that particular line item.

Ms C. Irwin: Thank you very much, minister and member. This is under the controlled grants and subsidies part of the budget. It is a one-off grant to the WA branch of the Australian Centre for Child Protection—ACCPWA—to develop and prioritise workforce capacity building as part of our implementation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommendations. It has been contracted to develop workforce capacity building and to deliver those courses. Once it is developed, it can be an ongoing online program. Some money will also be provided to two child sexual abuse therapeutic services that we fund to trial an advocacy function. Again, that was a recommendation from the royal commission. That function will then be evaluated, and the government can consider the outcome.

Ms M. BEARD: Once that framework is put in place, will consideration be given to funding those groups that actually take those functions on? Is that what I am hearing? Sorry; I might have confused the minister. I can clarify it if she wants.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I think it is a bit similar to a previous question. It is a trial, and we look forward to the feedback and evaluation to determine future funding investments.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 507. I note the minister has previously touched on the family and domestic violence response teams. These teams are to operate on a seven-day basis across all 17 districts. How many teams are currently in operation across all 17 districts?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Since 2013, 17 FDV response teams have been operating in those 17 locations that I mentioned.

Ms L. METTAM: How many FTEs are allocated to these 17 teams in total?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I stated earlier, these FDV response teams are a critical part of supporting victim-survivors and, more importantly, keeping them safe. They work by having police, child protection staff and community sector partners co-located and working together to do that outreach. I am advised that the FTEs vary from site to site depending on the demand. Of course, in this year's budget, we will also expand them to ensure that we have a trial of men's workers in five of the FDV response teams to work with perpetrators. Also, 34 family and safety coordinators will be added. I think we are bringing those forward to make sure that they are part of that response, and corrective service officers will also be functioning in that place. I am happy for Dr Leggett to provide a little bit more detail about how that might vary from site to site.

Dr N. Leggett: Thank you for the question. As the minister said, the family and domestic violence response teams have been established for a while. They have been operating since 2013, with that core group of professionals being police, child protection staff and non-government family and domestic violence advocates. What is coming in this budget and is being built upon from previous budgets is expanding the capacity in those teams. Extra workers and FTEs will be brought in to help deal with the demand. One thing in this budget is \$25.6 million to increase staffing to move to a seven-day-a-week operation, because they currently operate five days a week. Extra FTEs will come online to work on the weekends and public holidays. That initiative has come out of a trial run over Christmas and New Year, referred to as Operation Keelia, which showed that it delivered much more timely responses to victim-survivors, particularly over the weekends. There was a much more immediate response to the perpetrator when the response teams were available on the weekends. The addition of adult community corrections officers to the 17 teams will be phased in over three years. We have a current trial of two teams working with a community corrections officer. It is essentially a scaling up of a pilot initiative to roll out statewide. There are 34 family safety officers who will be added to the teams, with two at each location. They are Department of Communities staff and their role is to work specifically with the highest risk cases and help support multiagency case coordination, a little bit like the Target 120 model. This will particularly recognise that when there are high-risk and high-complex needs, sometimes we need a number of different agencies to wrap around and help provide the service. The role of those two workers in each team will be to help do that coordination. We also have ongoing expansion funding for our coordinator response services, which are the non-government family and domestic violence advocates. They are receiving a boost of \$19 million over four years to help maintain their staffing at a higher level, but also to give them access to things like vehicles and brokerage so that they have a few more options for how they respond to victim-survivors.

Ms L. METTAM: Can I clarify a couple of things about how these teams will work? Firstly, will the uplift in additional staff come from the Department of Communities? Secondly, are these teams all at the same site or do they come together in response to a call-out or a crisis when it happens?

[5.20 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: I have been to three places now: Fremantle, Cockburn and a third place that escapes me. I think they work best when people are co-located. I guess that is why the feedback, one of the key recommendations and the focus area of the taskforce at the heart of this approach have been around the joint response and the sharing of information. The member can appreciate that, if there is an incident with police overnight, having someone like a child protection worker who can straightaway the next day access that data and share that intelligence will mean more immediate and appropriate responses and supports for that family. That is sort of at its heart. That is why the taskforce was so keen for us to invest further in this model. I am happy for Dr Leggett to elaborate in response to some of the member's specific questions.

Dr N. Leggett: I guess the specifics get to whom in the team the uplift is for. The expansion is particularly for child protection workers to operate on the weekends and for the non-government family and domestic violence advocates to work on the weekends as well. The family safety officers were a previous commitment of the government, but we are bringing forward the rollout. Originally, it had been planned that they would be phased in over three years, but we are bringing them all on in 2024–25. It was a previous commitment, but additional funding in this budget will make sure that all those workers are in place this year so they can start doing that case management role.

Ms L. METTAM: I imagine that one of the reasons the importance of these teams has been raised is the impact on children and the child protection concerns that are picked up. Does the minister have any evidence of how many child protection matters or incidents are raised as a consequence of FDV response teams? Child advocates have previously raised the importance of recognising the risks to the whole family unit, so it would be good to understand to what extent those risks have been identified and responded to.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I think having a child protection worker in those teams is absolutely critical because the member is right: children are the victims in family and domestic violence situations as much as women are. It is important that the child protection workforce is there. It also allows child protection staff to then go into that family, work with the family and, potentially, connect them with some of the early intervention programs to prevent what may ultimately occur—the child having to be removed because of safety concerns. The child protection worker is an absolutely fundamental part of the family and domestic violence response teams because we know that, unfortunately, in many or most cases of family and domestic violence, children are present and they are vulnerable. It is a really critical part that allows a child protection worker to hook up within the child protection system to provide support to the family to keep the child safe.

Ms M. BEARD: Apologies if I have got the wrong area, but I think it is on page 515. I am assuming it comes under the child protection assessments and investigations or the care arrangements and support services for children in the CEO's care. My question is about the 24/7 call number. The previous minister said that there is a 24/7 number that people can call at any time of the day or night if there is a problem on the ground.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Sorry. I am not sure about the line.

Ms M. BEARD: I think it comes under the care arrangements and support services, but I do not know where it fits within that.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Sorry, what page is it? Can the member give us a reference?

Ms M. BEARD: It is page 515. I am assuming it comes under the provision of safe and stable care arrangements and other support services for the safety, support and wellbeing of children. It says in the care of the CEO, but it is also about someone generally who may not yet be in the care of someone but needs help. Does that answer the question and make it clearer?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The support that is available on weekends for those circumstances, as the member knows, is the Crisis Care helpline.

Ms M. BEARD: Is it the same contact outside of office hours?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes. It operates 24/7.

Ms M. BEARD: I am sorry if I am confusing the minister, but the previous minister said that there is a number to call 24/7 and they will be able to help, but I have called it recently and previously. When I called it previously, it went through, and they were going to be in contact with someone on the ground in the location. How does that work? Is there someone on call all the time when that happens?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy for Mr Whitehouse to give a little bit more of an explanation to the member.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Crisis Care is a 24 hours a day, seven days a week service. There is a location where we have senior child protection workers on call and working 24 hours a day on shiftwork. Crisis Care responds in the metropolitan area. In country and regional locations where Crisis Care cannot respond, we also have a co-located worker with the police special operations command who is there all the time during the day. People are on call in different regions, and Crisis Care makes the decision when to call and disturb them on weekends to provide a response to people out of our office hours.

Ms M. BEARD: I am just using an example here. If I were to call that number from a region at three o'clock in the morning, would it be the police who intervene or would they call someone within each town to help that child?

Mr B. Whitehouse: It would depend on the nature of the call. Obviously, if it is immediate and life-threatening, the police will respond. Crisis Care will contact the police. If it requires a child protection response after hours, a phone call will be made to the on-call worker who would then respond. Depending on the situation, they would respond on their own or in pairs. Sometimes, they will respond with police for what is needed.

Ms M. BEARD: If a member of the community comes across a child and phones that number, does the child protection caseworker need to have the police as well? I am trying to get it clear in my own mind. It is a question I get regularly, and I am not sure.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Police are used for the safety of the worker or the safety of the child. The safety of the child is always paramount in everything, and the safety of our workers is as well. It will depend on any situation. In the situation that the member talked about, it will depend on myriad factors. If a member of the public comes across a child, it will depend on the location or the remoteness. For the immediate safety of the child, there may well be a direction for the member of the public to take that child to the police station. Then, typically, a child protection worker would respond after that.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I am referring to budget paper No 2, page 506, under significant issues impacting the agency and the prevention of family and domestic violence. The very last paragraph, 10.7, refers to expanding the Safe at Home program. Can the minister explain what the Safe at Home program is, which regions it is being expanded to and how it helps to keep victim-survivors safe?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I have spoken about Safe at Home a number of times during this session, but I am happy to elaborate on what is a really important part of our government's investment in keeping victim-survivors safe. At the heart of what we want to do, if at all possible, is our wish to support women to stay in their homes. We previously talked about children, and we know that keeping women safely at home with their children is less disruptive for everyone, and that is our priority. The Safe at Home program helps to do that and has two key elements. The first part is around safety planning and supporting things such as security checks and audits, and doing necessary upgrades, whether it is doorbells or new locks. The second part of the Safe at Home program is ensuring that those victim-survivors are connected with various support services so they can continue on their journey in recovery from family and domestic violence. It is important that this program is continued to be supported because whenever possible we want to keep women safely at home.

The member talked about where it is being rolled out throughout the state. I recently made the announcement that the Safe at Home program is being extended to other regional areas including Kalgoorlie, Port Hedland and Kununurra, and earlier last year we announced it was also being rolled out in Katanning and Fitzroy Crossing. A key ask at the summit on family and domestic violence in August last year was more investment in Safe at Home, because whenever possible, we want to keep women at home where their lives, families and networks are, but do so safely. I am really proud that we are continuing to invest in Safe at Home.

[5.30 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to elaborate on what the take-up has been for the Safe at Home program? What has demand been like in the previous financial year and also the last two or three years?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said, the Safe at Home program was a key ask from the summit talks and our sector partners. I am really pleased that we are continuing to roll out this program into all areas of Western Australia because we know that we need to keep supporting women to be safe at home. This program does that.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to say how many women have used the program in the last 12 months?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I have been made aware that a national evaluation is publicly available. Certainly that, as well as our sector partners and the outcomes from the summit, have driven our continued investment into this area, because we know it is a much-needed investment to ensure that we continue to provide opportunities for women to stay at home if it is safe to do so. I am really happy that we have made this investment in this year's budget. We will continue to see what else we can do to build on a program that has been called for by the sector and that is welcomed by women who want to stay in their communities and keep their children safe at home to continue their normal lives.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 506 and the paragraph "Early Years Partnership—Child Wellbeing and School Readiness". It states —

... investment in support for families and community infrastructure directly responds to actions in the community-led plans launched in 2023. This will increase child wellbeing and school readiness by improving access to early learning opportunities, early identification and intervention services ...

How many FTEs are dedicated to that effort? What does it look like on the ground?

Ms S.E. WINTON: That is a good question. I could probably fill the next 20 minutes with that question. I am not trying to be flippant, but it is a program that I am pretty passionate about and one that is seeking to make a significant difference in young children's lives. We know that from ages zero to four is when 85 per cent to 95 per cent of a child's brain develops. This is about providing services and supports so that those young children can reach their potential and be school ready when they get to school. The reason I reacted to what it hopes to achieve or what it looks like is, like I said previously, this program is a partnership between the state government, Minderoo Foundation and the Telethon Kids Institute. It is being delivered in four unique communities throughout Western Australia. I always use Katanning, because the name central great southern does not roll off the tongue, but Katanning is central to it. It takes in about six local authorities. Then there is Armadale, which is very different again; Derby and two outlying communities; and also Bidyadanga. These are four very different communities and four very different environments where young children are growing up. That means there are four very different kinds of responses and aspirations that families have in those communities.

A key part of the work in determining the programs and the infrastructure and supports that are going to be rolled out to those communities is about the community telling us what they need. That process was very consultative over a long time, whereby families talked about their aspirations for their children and what the challenges were for them in their particular locations. Like I mentioned previously, I would suggest there are some common themes in all four locations, but there are also key differences that show the uniqueness of those locations. For example, in this year's budget we have made the announcement to further back in that important program with our government committing a further \$15.6 million with a co-investment of \$19 million by the Minderoo Foundation, which will see 24 key projects. I say this again: they were not plucked out of the sky; they were designed and put together by those four communities. That money is an investment in 24 key projects that have been identified in those communities. They are very distinctive and unique and reflect the communities in which those children live.

For example, in Derby, one of the priorities is for the construction of an early learning and family centre. In the great southern region, where lots of families are living in a very scattered location, one of their requests was for increased child dental health services with mobile outreach to allow their children to get those important checks. In Bidadanga, which is some 300 kilometres from Broome, families said that one of their key challenges is getting allied health workers and other support staff into the community. They want some accommodation upgrades to allow those workers to come into the community and do that important health screening and other support work. In Armadale, one key thing people identified as being really critical for their children is more child and maternal health checks.

It is a unique program, but, at its heart, it is place based. I did not mention before that the Telethon Kids Institute is an important, key partner in evaluating the program. I know that the Minderoo Foundation, the Telethon Kids Institute and the state government have great hopes for the delivery of more place-based services and supports for families and children. It is the way of the future. This work is also a really important piece of research for future policy on and investments into how we support families and young children. Importantly, we are very confident that it will make a great impact on young children in those four communities.

[5.40 pm]

I refer specifically to the FTE. As I mentioned previously, the Department of Communities is the lead partner for government, but the Departments of Education and Health also play a role. In terms of the resourcing from the Department of Communities, I am advised that eight FTE help to coordinate this program, with one on the ground in each community. There is also support and central coordination from the Departments of Education and Health, which also put in FTE, as well as, of course, the support we get from Minderoo.

Ms L. METTAM: How many FTE is the state government funding as part of this commitment?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The \$15.6 million in this year's state budget and the \$19 million from Minderoo is specifically funding 24 key projects and infrastructure projects in those locations. The FTE and the support for coordinating the delivery of the programs has been and will continue to be funded internally.

Ms L. METTAM: The department is funding the organisations to run these programs. I am not sure whether the minister will be able to answer this question. What is the interaction with the families or the parents? What is their involvement in these programs, if any?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I described before, the services are quite unique to each location. I was previously asked how many children this will have an impact on, and I think—correct me if I am wrong—in total, some 2 700 children in those four communities will benefit from the various programs. But I want to stress, as I have done before, that it does not mean 2 700 children will get a dental check, because a service is located in a particular location. It depends on the location and the services and programs that each community has identified and asked for, so it is really hard to quantify it in a uniform way.

Ms L. METTAM: I have a new question relating to page 506 and the prevention of family and domestic violence. Paragraph 10.3 refers to expanding and enhancing the respectful relationships program. What does the expansion of that program look like? Which schools are involved and what are the ages of the students?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for the question. As the member knows, primary prevention is absolutely critical if we are going to end the scourge of family and domestic violence. Funding and supporting things like the 16 Days in WA campaign and other public awareness campaigns is another really critical part of that, but, like the member said, programs like respectful relationships are critical if we are going to make a change in young people's attitudes to what is very often gendered attitudes in our society, particularly in young people. We were the first government—I am pretty proud of this—to invest in primary prevention and we are continuing to build on that. Certainly, the taskforce also indicated that we need to double down and increase our efforts around primary prevention.

The \$72.6 million funding announced in November includes a fivefold increase in funding for primary prevention. I am just trying to find the bit that talks about respectful relationships. We have implemented and expanded the program into schools. We are now extending it to non-government schools, and, importantly, extending it to sports

groups as well, which is really critical. I am happy to ask Dr Leggett to provide some more information about how we are increasing our funding for primary prevention, which is an absolutely critical element, because we really need to stop this violence before it starts.

Dr N. Leggett: Thank you for the question. The respectful relationships teaching support program first came into operation after a 2017 election commitment. The program commenced in 2019, and it was originally a commitment to offer the program in 10 schools a year. After the 2021 election, the program was expanded to 22 schools a year, and at the moment that is the number we are operating at. We have had 102 primary and secondary schools in the public system engage in the program since its commencement in 2019. At the outset, the taskforce—the Department of Education, Catholic Education Western Australia and the Association of Independent Schools Western Australia—released a statement of commitment that they were going to make respectful relationships education compulsory in the curriculum in all schools across the three sectors. This expansion funding is about expanding into CEWA and AISWA schools as well so we can think about how we can back in a broader range of teachers to deliver the compulsory curriculum. We will continue the teaching support program as it currently is. It is quite a high-intensity program of support that engages schools for quite a long time—up to 12 months—but we are also looking at ways we can support a broader base of teachers to deliver what is now a compulsory curriculum subject in schools across all three sectors.

[5.50 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I probably missed it, but when was the agreement made with the independent schools? Was that last year?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy for Dr Leggett to provide an answer.

Dr N. Leggett: It was in September last year. It was part of the announcement about the establishment of the taskforce.

Ms L. METTAM: Is it compulsory for public schools to undertake this program? What are the parameters around the use of the program? Is it a certain age?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I think this question is best asked of Minister Buti in terms of what is compulsory or not compulsory in the curriculum. What I can say is that I will continue to encourage all schools to participate in not just the respectful relationships program as delivered through Starick, but also the many programs that schools individually do already in terms of respectful behaviours. I went to North Butler Primary School with the Attorney General and it has a program that runs from pre-primary right through to year 6 focused on anti-bullying and respectful relationships generally, rather than just the labelled program run by Starick. Schools have a role to play in that. In terms of the member's specific question about whether it is compulsory in the curriculum, I think that is a question for the minister.

Ms L. METTAM: Has the program changed in the last 12 months?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The content?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes. What informs the content of the program and to what extent has the program changed?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy for Dr Leggett to provide the member with some information.

Dr N. Leggett: The respectful relationships teaching support program is operated by Starick, which is a family and domestic violence organisation operating in WA. Starick developed the content with advice and consideration from Our Watch, which is the national primary prevention foundation that essentially has a role in gathering together the relevant evidence about what works in the primary prevention of violence against women. The program has also been independently evaluated. There are ways in which Starick is continually thinking about and improving on it.

Ms L. METTAM: In terms of the objectives of the program, I imagine that the emphasis may have changed over time. What is the overall objective of respectful relationships?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As Dr Leggett said, it is an evidence-based program that taps into national best practice in terms of delivering curriculum. I am no expert in the respectful relationships curriculum or in that as a speciality, but all curriculum, no matter the subject matter, is constantly evaluated, reviewed, modernised and modified depending on the circumstances, such as whether it is for young kids as opposed to older kids or for the regions as opposed to the city. That is my expectation. When I have developed curriculum, that is what happened.

Ms M. BEARD: I have a brief question around the out-of-home-care program. There is a reference to the changes, which I support, at the top of page 506 of budget paper No 2. Those changes should definitely be sufficient in terms of turning the dial and making it a better outcome for these children. Some Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are involved. There is out-of-home care and foster care. When there are not enough foster carers in a location, does the ACCO or anyone else provide temporary accommodation for any of the children?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy for Mr Whitehouse to provide some further comments on this really significant reform. I acknowledge that it has been a challenging and complex process for not only the Department of Communities but also service providers. The transition is complex. I agree that, as a result, we will see a system that is much more responsive to the needs of kids in care, and that is a good thing.

Mr B. Whitehouse: One new part of the system is the 17 temporary care houses. There is a care house for every district in the state, right from Albany through to the metropolitan area and right up to Kununurra. Those temporary care houses are local. They have four beds. They can take children for up to three months, either immediately when they come into care or if there is a care arrangement breakdown. A fair number of them are managed through Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. When a child comes into care, they will obviously have had trauma and be experiencing separation from their biological parents.

One thing that we want to make sure they do is that they keep the rest of the connections to their family. It is built into the contracts that these kids must still go to the same school and be taken to the school, as an example, to keep them around their connections. The intent of those children being there for three months is, number one, to work really hard to get those children back to their parents, because the best window to get children back is right when they come into care. The second thing, as a parallel process, is to identify family. So, they are close to their community and then we identify family for those children to go to. The third option is to find a non-family member to care for that child after the three months.

One of the important and really valuable parts of the new system as it relates to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations is that when an ACCO is caring for children in a temporary care house, the ACCO has the capacity to go and search for family for an Aboriginal child who may be in that temporary care house. ACCOs get access to people and have knowledge and networks that the Department of Communities may not have by reason of who we are. The ACCO can potentially transition that child straight from that temporary care house to a family member. That provides stability and connection. The intent is to either get that child home or into family.

Ms M. BEARD: First, where are the 17 locations? Secondly, WA is an enormous state and a lot of regional towns are in dire need of this service because there are no foster carers. Is there a timeline for the ones that will be put in place?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Mr Whitehouse.

The CHAIR: Mr Whitehouse, you have about 30 seconds.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I have never known him to speak for 30 seconds!

Mr B. Whitehouse: They are almost all in place. There are two remaining. The 17 locations are linked to the 17 district offices of the Department of Communities.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm

Division 35: Communities — Service 1, Women’s Interests —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Dr J. Krishnan, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Women’s Interests.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Ms C. Irwin, Assistant Director General, Strategy and Partnerships.

Mr W. Millen, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms N. Kozulin, Executive Director, Office of the Director General.

[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. I 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 these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister or, in this case, the parliamentary secretary may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the parliamentary secretary 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 parliamentary secretary suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

Member for Central Wheatbelt.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, parliamentary secretary. Can I go to page 505 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2 and start with the most obvious question, which I am sure the parliamentary secretary prepared for! For 2024–25, \$1 million is budgeted and then there is nothing into the forward estimates. Could the parliamentary secretary please give me an explanation of what the \$1 million is for and why it disappears into the ether?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for her question. The Women's Grants for a Stronger Future program has been an important source of funding to support a range of initiatives to advance gender equality in Western Australia. A significant expansion of the program in 2022 saw funding increase from \$85 000 to \$335 000 to support further initiatives to drive better outcomes for women in this state. The 2023–24 round of the programs saw more than \$530 000 delivered to 57 organisations, with grants ranging from \$1 800 to \$10 000. The grants are spread across the priority areas of women's health and wellbeing, economic independence, safety and justice to align with the state government's *Stronger together: WA's plan for gender equality*. Recipients include the West Australian Football Commission's female umpiring academy project, which aims to increase the number of umpires in the sport from 11 per cent to 40 per cent by 2030. The proposed academy will provide comprehensive training and support for aspiring female umpires through mentorship programs, networking opportunities and ongoing professional development to ensure their long-term success and retention.

Other projects to receive funding include the Bike-Curious Slay the Way pilot peer-support program, co-designed with year 6 and year 11 girls to encourage girls to keep riding to school after their transition from primary to secondary school. The Spiers Centre's financial empowerment for women overcoming adversity program teaches women experiencing financial hardship how to manage their finances. Reach Her's health and wellbeing and economic independence program will provide support to women from diverse backgrounds at the Victoria Park Community Centre. Orana House's Young Women Warriors project is a specialised mentoring program designed to engage and support women aged 10 to 18 years who have experienced family and domestic violence in their family of origin. The Perth African Women Association's HealthHer: Promoting Women's Health and Wellbeing project will promote, empower and enhance the health and wellbeing of women of all ages and backgrounds. Spacecubed foundation runs the Boosted: Women in Leadership Series project, which provides the chance to learn directly from business leaders. Finally, the Exmouth Chamber of Commerce and Industry will host the Empower: Women's Leadership Conference project.

The funding is on top of two \$75 000 discretionary grants for two projects that aim to empower Western Australian women with the knowledge, skills and confidence to foster their entrepreneurial talents. These grants align with the 2024 theme of International Women's Day, "Invest in women: Accelerate progress" and were awarded to the We Are Emersyn Foundation, which will deliver the Emerge Entrepreneur program for 25 emerging female entrepreneurs seeking visibility, traction and a solid foundation to grow their business. Empowering women in Western Australia to achieve economic independence through entrepreneurship will provide an opportunity for up to 100 women with small or microbusinesses to grow their business through training, upskilling and business skill improvement workshops.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, parliamentary secretary. So that I am clear, are they all the programs that will be funded under the \$1 million listed in the budget for this year, 2024–25? Is that fully allocated?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Thank you, member, for the further question. The list of programs I read out from this document were the programs that have already been implemented. We are due to open our grant programs round for 2024–25, which is where the \$1 million has been allocated.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The programs the parliamentary secretary just read out were funded from the \$358 000 under the 2023–24 estimated actual expenditure. We now have \$1 million for 2024–25; is that correct?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The \$1 million is quite a jump. It is a significant increase, which, as shadow Minister for Women's Interests, I think is great. Congratulations. How is it going to be allocated? Are there going to be funding rounds? Will it be by application? Will it be ad hoc? Will there be an announcement? I have community groups in my electorate and I am sure others would like to know how it is going to be allocated.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for appreciating the further funding for women's interests. We all agree with it and, for some policies, we need to work together. Community feedback has been very supportive of the women's grants program's improved capacity to support innovative and pilot projects for women. The importance of higher value grants has fuelled innovation in the women's interests sector. The blend of \$10 000 and other grants, along with newly available, higher-value grants, has enabled the department to support a wider range of organisations and projects. This has supported the Department of Communities' work to contemporise the Women's Grants for a Stronger Future program and ensure greater alignment with the implementation of *Stronger together: WA's plan for gender equality*. A significant uplift in funding will allow for an updated model for women's grants. The standard annual grants round of \$10 000 or less will continue. These will be complemented by a range of higher-value grants, giving the flexibility to pivot to address current and specific women's interests issues. The model has been enthusiastically received by organisations because it enables them to undertake longer, more targeted projects, with more sophisticated evaluation and outcome measurements. Grant applications usually open in September, with the successful recipients announced the following year on International Women's Day, which is 8 March each year. With increased interest from community groups, we have gained an awareness that more organisations are applying.

[7.10 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am still not clear how much is allocated for the \$10 000 and how much is for the higher-value grants, and how the higher-value grants will be requested. How does one access the higher-value grants and what is the global amount for the \$10 000 grants that have been outlined?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for the question. The value of grants up to \$10 000 will continue. There is an allocation for higher-value grants in this round as well.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am looking for the global amount; it will not be one \$10 000 grant. How many \$10 000 grants will be available? What is allocated in that \$1 million for the small grant round?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: The details are still to be confirmed because the grant round opens in September. The idea of allocating additional funding is to allow for more than \$10 000 grants for organisations that really want to empower women and invest in that area.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am not meaning to be difficult; I am trying to understand what the \$1 million will be spent on. There will be a mix of smaller grants and bigger grants but, as I understand it, that has yet to be defined. There is a global amount of \$1 million, and there will be clarity at some point about how much will be allocated in a grant round to which people can apply, with a smaller amount available, as opposed to perhaps an organisation approaching the government and saying, “I’ve got this great idea; how can I work with you?” I want to understand how that second part will work and how much is likely to be allocated for the first part.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: As I said, those details are currently being worked out. If the member looks at the line item, the actual spend, or estimated spend, for the financial year 2023–24 is \$358 000. That basically means that grants up to \$10 000 that were claimed in the previous year will continue to exist. The additional funding is when it is identified that the \$10 000 government support is not enough. Those costs are being worked out at the moment.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: One million dollars is not significant for a state the size of Western Australia. Do I go back to my electorate tomorrow and say to those organisations that have a passion for empowering, supporting, promoting and engaging with women that they should build a business case and pitch it or are there parameters I should know about so that the government is not flooded with queries tomorrow?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: My suggestion is that those organisations wait for more details to come in. They will clearly know from the details that the continuation of funds for grants below \$10 000 will be in place, but there will be further detail about what the maximum grants level will be, which is about \$10 000, and how many people will be afforded that. Organisations can then decide whether to apply for the smaller grant or the bigger grant. The details are due to be announced in the September round.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there a timeline for when that detail will be available?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: The grants open in September.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: September this year?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Yes. The following year on International Women’s Day is when the announcements will be made—8 March 2025.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The first part of my question way back 15 minutes ago was: why is there no money in the out years?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: An ongoing amount of \$85 000 has been allocated; it is part of an ongoing budget process. The fund is allocated to the Department of Communities, which then allocates funds for women’s interests as a subcategory.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That was my next question. I can see under controlled grants and subsidies the \$85 000 across the out years, but I do not understand how it relates to the \$1 million about which we have just been speaking.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Can the member point me to a page number and line item?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 525, “Women’s Interests—Women’s Grants” at the bottom of the page above “Youth Support Services and Grants”. I can see the \$1 million. The parliamentary secretary talked about \$85 000 across the out years. Is that different to what we have been talking about?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: The \$85 000 in the out years is a constant Communities grant. The additional \$1 million funding is purely for grants for this year based on the response on the planning and outcome. The future years’ allocations will be done in future budgets.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: This is the trickiest one I have done all day! Parliamentary secretary, I am sorry, but I do not understand. I can see the \$1 million next to the line item “Women’s Grants For a Stronger Future”. That is a discrete funding program. Then \$1.085 million is outlined on page 525, with \$85 000 allocated in each of the out years. Is more than one funding stream included there and, if so, can the parliamentary secretary tell me what they are?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: The \$85 000 was previously budgeted and the \$1 million is top-up funding specifically for grants this year. Further years’ budgets will depend on program outcomes, assessments and recommendations.

The CHAIR: I refer the parliamentary secretary to page 525 and the 2024–25 budget, there is an allocation of \$1 085 000. Is that the \$1 million additional that the member for Central Wheatbelt is talking about, plus the \$85 000?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Yes. It is \$1 million top-up funding, chair.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Just for this year —

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: — in an election year. We got there eventually!

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Funding in the previous year was \$538 000. There is a top-up again because we realised that many organisations are not able to implement a complete program with the \$10 000 cap.

[7.20 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to the service summary and the expenses across the line item “Community Services” on page 509, which is where the resources sit. I presume that the minister has a resource for FTE dedicated to women’s policy development. Can the parliamentary secretary advise whether it sits in that service area on page 509?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for her question. The women’s interests portfolio works across government, community and business sectors to inform a strategic response to the following issues relating to gender equality in Western Australia.

With respect to staffing, there are 8.6 FTE policy staff in the women’s interests team in the Department of Communities. The team has a small operational budget. It administered an annual grants program for 2024–25 worth \$1 085 000, which we discussed in the previous question. It received a grant from the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety of \$450 000 for 2024–25.

The women’s interests team provides support to the Minister for Women’s Interests, including but not limited to the state strategy *Stronger together: WA’s plan for gender equality*. The work of the Department of Communities’ women’s interests team is guided by *Stronger together: WA’s plan for gender equality*. Stronger Together provides a 10-year framework for coordinated action across government, industry and the community to drive gender equality. Launched in 2020, Stronger Together has four priority areas: health and wellbeing; safety and justice; economic independence; and leadership, reflecting the leading issues that impact on Western Australian women’s lives and engagement with their communities.

As well as leading the development of Stronger Together, the women’s interests team oversees the actions within, develops the accompanying action plans, oversees and monitors the actions within and collates information pertaining to and drafts the annual progress reports on behalf of the Minister for Women’s Interests.

The women’s interests team is the secretariat to the Stronger Together implementation group, a tripartite body to inform the implementation of Stronger Together. The purpose of the group is to provide a collaborative forum between the public sector and the community, business and academic sectors to maximise efforts and expertise. The women’s interests team reports back to and raises issues through the Minister for Women’s Interests and the director general of the Department of Communities. The group meets a minimum of three times a year.

The women’s interests team contributes to the development and ongoing implementation of several state and national strategies. They include *Working for women: A strategy for gender equality*, a national strategy: *National plan to end violence against women and children 2022–2032*; *National women’s health strategy 2020–2030*; *Path to safety: Western Australia’s strategy to reduce family and domestic violence 2020–2030*; *A Western Australia for everyone: State disability strategy 2020–2030*; *An age-friendly WA: State seniors strategy 2023–2033*; *All paths lead to a home: Western Australia’s 10-year strategy on homelessness 2020–2030*; and the *Western Australian volunteering strategy action plan 2023–2026: Enriching lives, strengthening communities*. An action plan for young people in Western Australia is under development.

The women’s interests team undertakes many and varied projects, which as a collective work towards gender equality in Western Australia. The key projects include women’s grants for a stronger future. The women’s grants for a stronger future program provides funding to Western Australian organisations to promote and deliver programs to address the unique issues faced by Western Australian women and support the ongoing implementation of *Stronger together: WA’s plan for gender equality*.

Each year the women’s interests team leads the Western Australian government’s celebration of women and girls via promotion of the Australian National Committee for UN Women theme; coordinating events, including a ministerial event, webinars and refreshing the International Women’s Day toolkit; public relations, including provision of IWD awareness ribbons; a social media plan and sharing short stories on inspirational women.

Public sector procurement is an opportunity for the government to leverage its purchasing power to raise awareness and create behaviour change to progress gender equality. The gender equality in procurement pilot commenced on 1 July 2022, with 19 agencies currently participating and five government trading enterprises to start an aligned pilot from 1 July 2024.

Since 2024, women's report cards have been produced by women's interests and provide a statistical snapshot of women in WA across a range of key indicators. The reports are an evidence base to inform policies, services and programs in the public, corporate and community sectors.

Although public sector agencies are not mandated to report under the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2021, the women's interests team has been leading the Department of Communities' participation in the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's reporting pilot program. The pilot was designed to test voluntary reporting of public sector gender equality data to identify key areas where women experience disadvantage and discrimination in the workplace.

A number of women's interests team projects have a focus on women's safety, including workplace safety, including the *Sexual violence prevention and response strategy*. In September 2021, the state government announced the development of Western Australia's first sexual violence prevention and response strategy. The strategy is co-sponsored by the Minister for Women's Interests, the Attorney General and the Minister for Health. It provides a whole-of-government framework to prevent sexual violence, improve service responses and promote positive outcomes for victim-survivors and accountability for perpetrators. The women's interests team at Communities is leading the development of the strategy along with representatives from the Department of Justice and is being informed by the experiences and voices of victim-survivors, the WA community and the professionals and services working to prevent and respond to sexual violence. The development includes a statewide consultation process to inform development of the strategy, which concluded in November 2023. The consultation findings are now being used to finalise the strategy and develop an implementation plan.

In 2020, the Australian Human Rights Commission handed down the report *Respect@Work: Sexual harassment national inquiry report (2020)*, which outlines 55 recommendations for government, industry, business and the community to prevent and respond to workplace sexual harassment. In 2021, the state government, through the Department of Communities, committed to implementing 18 Respect@Work recommendations relevant to state and territory government agencies.

On 23 June 2022, the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee tabled '*Enough is enough: Sexual harassment against women in the FIFO industry*'. The '*Enough is Enough*' report made 79 findings and 24 recommendations for implementation by the state government and the mining and resources sector. The Women's Interests Team is working with the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety on the implementation of the recommendations.

The state government response to the '*Enough is Enough*' report builds on existing initiatives to address workplace sexual harassment under the mental awareness, respect and safety program. MARS is led by DEMIRS in partnership with the Mental Health Commission, the Equal Opportunity Commission and the Department of Communities. The MARS program is a whole-of-government initiative that aims to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of workers and others in the mining industry.

Communities is working in partnership with DEMIRS to develop an expanded approach to the respectful relationships program as part of the suite of initiatives under the MARS program.

[7.30 pm]

The CHAIR: Parliamentary secretary, can I stop you there? I gave all members instruction that not only questions, but also answers should be short. I am not sure whether we needed that level of comprehensive information in response to the member's question. Maybe the member for Central Wheatbelt can indicate whether her question has been adequately answered.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, chair. At the beginning of the answer, I learnt that there were 8.6 FTE in the department. I was very pleased to receive the rest of the information around the work that the 8.6 FTE are very busily acquitting across the government, in partnership. The parliamentary secretary mentioned that the FTE has a small operational budget. Could the parliamentary secretary advise me what that small operational budget is?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for the question. The bulk of the line item goes towards the salaries of the staff—the 8.6 FTE. The majority of the approved grants were spent on women's interests. There is a very small amount—approximately \$10 000—in the operational budget for International Women's Day.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is the operational budget \$10 000? Is the parliamentary secretary able to tell me what the FTE budget is? The parliamentary secretary can give it to me as supplementary information if he wants to list the levels and staffing positions.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for the question. The budget for the 8.6 FTE salaries is approximately a million dollars in total.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The parliamentary secretary mentioned in his previous answer the Stronger Together implementation group and the work that it is doing. He also said that it meets three times a year. Can the parliamentary secretary advise me of the membership of the group and whether the minister attends each of those meetings?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for the question. The group consists of government agencies, non-government agencies, academics and industry. The minister attended the first meeting of the tripartite group last year.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is the parliamentary secretary able to provide as supplementary information the membership of the group?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for the question. I ask the member to put the question on notice and we can provide it straightaway after the session.

The CHAIR: Will the parliamentary secretary provide that by notice or as supplementary information?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: It is not readily available at the moment. If the member can put the question on notice, we will be able to provide it.

The CHAIR: Does the parliamentary secretary want the member to put the question on notice or will he provide it as supplementary information?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I am requesting it be put on notice because it is simple information.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: There must be an agenda with the list. Surely that is something the government can provide within the supplementary notice period. Is it a state secret?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: We can provide the names, member, but it is not readily available.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I just want the membership of the Stronger Together implementation group. That is all I am asking for.

The CHAIR: If the parliamentary secretary can just repeat what he will provide, I can allocate a supplementary information number.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: We can provide the list of members of the Stronger Together implementation group.

[*Supplementary Information No B12.*]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, parliamentary secretary.

This question follows on from something the parliamentary secretary mentioned—the *Stronger Together: WA's plan for gender equality*. Within that document is a reference to the sexual violence prevention and response strategy. The Stronger Together gender equality plan says that the sexual violence prevention and response strategy will be completed and released in 2024. Is the parliamentary secretary able to advise when that is likely to occur and whether funding is reflected in the budget for the implementation of any of the recommendations or allowances for the advice that is likely to be included in that report?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for the question. The report is yet to be released. Once it is, a strategy will be designed and a budget allocated accordingly based on the recommendations that come through.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can the parliamentary secretary advise when it is likely to be released? I understand that it has not been released. It says it will be released in 2024. Is there a timeline? There must be discussions within government about when it would like to see that completed.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for the question. Certain consultation is still underway. That has not been completed, so we cannot comment on when it will be released.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Urgent then, is it, parliamentary secretary?

The CHAIR: I think that was rhetorical.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: My last question—I do not know whether other members have questions—is on the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators for the Department of Communities on page 510. The women's interests directorate or unit—I do not know what it is called—sits within the department. Is there a reason there are no key effectiveness indicators or outcomes listed in the budget? I regularly hear the government talk about the importance of the portfolio. Why are there no measurement parameters in the budget so that we can see whether or not they are being met?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for the question. Various departments are involved in this process, as the member knows, and women's interests supports a very long list of things that are involved. Those KPIs are incorporated in those departments and support women's interests groups. That is why we do not have separate KPIs for women's interests.

[7.40 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: With the greatest respect, parliamentary secretary, if there are no performance indicators or targets, the government cannot measure whether it is successful. I read the government's *Stronger together: WA's plan for gender equality* document. It basically encapsulates everything the parliamentary secretary was in the process of reading out, but it does not actually tell anyone whether we are shifting the dial on these things. There is a lot of funding, announcements and programs, but the reason for budgets and key effectiveness indicators, and outcomes for every department and every aspect of government, is to measure progress. There needs to be some transparency as to whether we are spending taxpayers' dollars appropriately, whether it is effective, and whether it needs to be revised. This government spends a lot of time talking about the impact it has on shifting the dial on issues relating to women. Can I have an explanation for why that is not reflected in financial budget papers?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for her question. As I said earlier, the women's interest group supports multiple agencies or organisations together. Each of them have key performance indicators. A report card is produced by the women's interests group and the *Stronger together* interim report is expected towards the end of this year. The performance of the women's interests group will be reflected in those report cards.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: This portfolio covers many departments, and I accept that this area impacts every portfolio. Is the parliamentary secretary aware of performance indicators in other departments that allow the responsible minister to measure how departments are doing, outside of the report card, as an objective process?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: The midpoint evaluation is something that all agencies have to contribute to, and when the midpoint evaluation of the 10-year plan is released, the member will see the details.

The CHAIR: Any other questions on this division? I give the call to the member for Joondalup.

Ms E.L. HAMILTON: I refer to page 503 and the total appropriations provided to deliver services. Can the parliamentary secretary outline what the government is doing to promote gender equality through procurement practices?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: A key lever for government is through a procurement process. We are a large purchaser of goods and services and there is increasing discussion about how we use that lever to create change. To this end, the Department of Communities, in partnership with the Department of Finance, has trialled a new approach through a gender equality and procurement pilot, with 19 government agencies participating to include a gender equality clause as part of the procurement process. The purpose of the public sector pilot is to raise awareness of the value of workplace gender equality for suppliers, and to mainstream the language of equality within Western Australian organisations, particularly small businesses. Organisations are asked for evidence of compliance with the federal workplace gender equality agency, with nine questions about the measures they are taking to tackle gender equality, like paid parental leave, flexible work and audits of gender pay gaps. As of 21 April 2024, 532 supplier contracts and 316 overall contracts have been awarded with a total value of \$746 648 554. This includes works contracts valued at more than \$310 million, and \$436 million in goods and services contracts, which includes community and social services. The pilot program will end on 30 June 2024. The government is currently exploring options for implementing the pilot as part of permanent procurement practices. A separate pilot trialling the inclusion of the gender equality clause in government trading enterprise procurement will commence in 1 July 2024.

Work has also commenced on a separate pilot partnering with industry in the highly male-dominated non-residential construction sector. The government has joined with ADCO Constructions to increase female representation on non-residential construction projects and demonstrate what can be achieved by female talent within the construction industry. On the Fremantle Hospital 40-bed mental health redevelopment project, WA was the second jurisdiction in Australia after Victoria to introduce a gender equality clause in public sector procurement. The WA government has committed to encouraging businesses and organisations of all sizes that participate in government procurement to play their part in creating gender-equal workplaces in their everyday operations. Developing and implementing resources to support the gender equality clause within WA government procurement is an initiative of the second action plan under *Stronger together: WA's plan for gender equality*. The *Stronger together* plan is the first whole-of-government long-term plan to advance gender equality in WA. Research shows companies with gender diversity are more profitable and productive and have improved employee satisfaction and decision-making. It makes good business sense to support and champion gender equality, and I am proud that the state government is taking the lead on this important issue.

The CHAIR: Any further questions in this division? No.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 13: Finance —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Dr J. Krishnan, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Finance.

Ms J. Cant, Director General.

Mr C. McMahon, Commissioner of State Revenue.

Ms J. McMahon, Director, Office of the Director General.

Ms N. Godecke, Deputy Director, General, Major Projects.

Mr S. Whitmarsh, Deputy Director General, Building and Contracts.

Mr G. Gilbert, Deputy Director General, Service and Invest.

Ms K. Ingham, Deputy Director General, Advisory Services.

Mr D. Geraghty, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms H. Farrell, Chief Customer Officer.

[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. I 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 these 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 the parliamentary secretary suggests that a matter should 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.

[7.50 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 162 and spending changes. My question relates to new initiatives and the line item “Sectoral Emissions Reduction Scheme—Electrical Vehicle Fleet Target”. Can the parliamentary secretary explain the significant increase in funding in the out years? Is it because the bulk of new purchases will need to be done at that time, or leases are expiring? Can the parliamentary secretary provide some clarification for the significant uptick?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Finance is responsible for promoting the uptake of electric vehicles in the government fleet, funding for EV charging infrastructure and amending new government building and leased accommodation requirements to allow for EV charging. Finance’s responsibility in this area stems from the strategy. The revised target currently applies to approximately 27 per cent of State Fleet vehicles and is expected to result in 1 300 new EVs once eligible vehicles have been replaced at the end of their lease term. It is estimated that 4 000 tonnes of emissions over three years will be avoided as a result of the revised EV target.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the parliamentary secretary able to state how many vehicles will be purchased and the makes, models and costs for each year in the budget and forward estimates?

The CHAIR: With respect, I would narrow that, member, because some of the models, for example, might not be currently available in Australia. That may well be information that the parliamentary secretary cannot readily provide. You might want to revise that question.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay. Is the parliamentary secretary able to provide a breakdown of how many vehicles will be purchased?

The CHAIR: I think that is better.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: They are ordered individually depending on need and the expiry of the lease terms.

Ms L. METTAM: What percentage will these EVs reduce emissions by? Has any modelling been done on that?

The CHAIR: I think that the parliamentary secretary already answered that.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Yes, 4 000 tonnes of emissions over three years will be avoided as a result of the revised EV target. Just a further clarification on the member’s question. This budget also requests Finance to invest about \$800 000 to install EV charging stations on government buildings. To date, we have supported 81 chargers installed across 49 projects, with approximately half of the funds still available for new projects.

The CHAIR: Can I intervene and ask a question, with the parliamentary secretary’s indulgence. Are those EV chargers that are being installed on government buildings accessible to the public?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: No, chair; they are for the employees and people who use the building. The parking spaces are not accessible to the public. They are being used by people in the building.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms L. METTAM: I have another question also on page 162, the spending changes, and the Aboriginal business capability building program. How are these funds being utilised to contribute to this project? Are they for FTEs?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: The Aboriginal business capability building program aims to increase the ability for Aboriginal businesses to successfully contract with government agencies. It does so by assisting Aboriginal businesses to develop their business capability. The government tendering process continues to present difficulties for many Aboriginal businesses trying to secure government contracts. Under the ABCB program, the Department of Finance contracts Aboriginal businesses as service providers to deliver business capability building services across Western Australia. The focus of this capability building includes tendering skills, business development, internal governance and contractual compliance. The ABCB program supports government and the agencies to achieve their mandated targets for the awarding of contracts to registered Aboriginal businesses under the Aboriginal procurement policy. Although the government sector as a whole has been successful in meeting APP targets, on

average, a third of all agencies with a significant contracting profile still do not meet their APP targets in any particular year. Continued capability building support through the ABCB program reaffirms the government's commitment to fostering Aboriginal business growth and to improving economic and social outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities.

Ms L. METTAM: Where is the government at in meeting the mandated targets? Have they been met under this program?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I will give the member some percentages of AP contracts awarded. In 2018–19, it was 4.77 per cent; in 2019–20, it was 5.55 per cent; in 2020–21, it was 6.35 per cent; in 2021–22, it was 5.6 per cent; and in 2022–23, it was the highest at 6.86 per cent. The target is four per cent, so we have consistently met the target.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that what has actually been achieved in terms of the percentage of contracts that have been awarded?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: What is the target?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: It is four per cent.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is five per cent?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: The target is four per cent.

Ms L. METTAM: Are we able to get an understanding of the total value of those contracts in terms of Aboriginal procurement?

[8.00 pm]

Dr J. KRISHNAN: It is \$254 million in contracts.

Ms L. METTAM: Is that over the 12-month period?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: It is since 2018.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that across government? The department is responsible for managing it across the entire government. Are there departments that do not meet the mandate and who are the offenders? The parliamentary secretary can tell me who does it really well if he wants to balance it out. There is a sheet. This is exciting. The parliamentary secretary can table that.

The CHAIR: No, we are not able to table in estimates.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: He could just lay it on the table—float it over.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for the question. This is public information about our procurement policy agency performance and from 2021 to 2023 is available. The member can see which departments are meeting the mandate and what percentage they are achieving.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is public information. Where will I find that?

Ms J. Cant: At wa.gov.au.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Okay, that is under the procurement processes program. Lovely, thank you. I will not waste anymore of the parliamentary secretary's time.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 162 under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" and the first paragraph, in relation to the state's market capacity and the department promoting the state's pipeline of works to interstate and international building and construction companies via extensive consultation. Can the department detail how this consultation is being conducted?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: In March and April 2024, the Department of Finance met with leading tier 1 and tier 2 contractors across the country as part of the market capacity strategy. The meeting sought to promote the state's asset investment program portfolio of major built form construction projects and identify and investigate potential innovative procurement planning and construction methods that would make Western Australia an attractive place to do business and encourage cost-effective methods of delivering projects that achieve improved value for money and many outcomes for the state. The department is reviewing industry's feedback about the collaborative process and is undertaking further research and analysis to identify and develop options that present opportunities for greater participation. In February 2024, the WA government launched a new online and interactive dashboard featuring current and planned non-residential building and other infrastructure projects, including hospitals, schools and other developments that form a key part of the state's asset investment program. The dashboard contributes to the increased industry transparency around the state's infrastructure program and supports the government's efforts to attract new entrants to the WA market and create increased competition and innovation.

Ms L. METTAM: Through this process, what was identified as the constraints to the state's market capacity or how the department or government were going to overcome those constraints? What were the takeaways?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: There was a perception that we are a one-builder city and the aim was to change the perception. The main constraints were about supply chain issues and materials and also skilled labour to complete the projects. That is where we will expand the scope.

Ms L. METTAM: What was identified as a way in which to address those constraints? Were there remedies or a plan of action?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: A range of recommendations and submissions are coming under the subcommittee of the Expenditure Review Committee in June. Members will get more details about that when it is considered.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Regarding upcoming projects, what are the department's initiatives that will come into play to accommodate the upcoming projects to give us that capacity and ensure that the market can accommodate these upcoming projects under some new initiatives?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I request that the director general answer the question.

Ms J. Cant: A number of things are being considered that will come up to the major projects ERC subcommittee in June. Some of the things we are considering are forms of contract, such as whether the bid costs of some projects can be refunded, whether we can smooth our pipeline a little more, and whether we can look at either breaking down big projects or bundling projects. There are a lot of things in the mix that the government will consider in June. I am very sure there will be a positive announcement following that.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 162, under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". The third paragraph refers to the asset management reform program. There is a range of office accommodation initiatives to generate savings and I see there has been \$37 million against a \$48 million savings target. Has this meant rationalisation of physical buildings? I understand there are five locations in the metropolitan area and the department is consolidating the team into one place in Perth, but I am more interested in rationalisation of regional offices and whether there have been closures or changes in regional areas of Western Australia as a part of that program.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I request Ms Farrell to answer that question.

Ms H. Farrell: Thank you, parliamentary secretary. The savings under the asset management reform program are basically captured through better planning utilisation of our existing government office accommodation via contemporary fit-outs and achieving better value for money outcomes. From a regional perspective, our current vacancy rate in regional accommodation is 0.13 per cent and our target is 1.5 per cent, so it is very, very low. Last year we implemented an improved fit-out in the Bunbury office as an example and some fit-out projects in Kununurra will be undertaken in the coming year as well, but always to improve our utilisation across the regions and in the metropolitan area.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is quite a significant savings target. Has it meant that offices have closed so there is no longer a presence in any of those locations across regional Western Australia?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I request Ms Farrell answer that.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The government has a habit of centralising itself.

[8.10 pm]

Ms H. Farrell: The accommodation requirements are always looked at in terms of the functional and operational needs of the agency. It is a challenging market in regional areas, given the availability of options in small towns as an example. It is always looking at meeting the needs of the area and the agency that needs those services provided in that area, but there is not a targeted approach to reducing the regional footprint.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, but have there been closures? Savings have been made. I am not saying that there is a concerted effort going forward to do that; I am just wondering whether offices have been closed in regional communities. I am happy to take it as supplementary information.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: We are not aware of any locations being closed. I can give the member some details. Savings were achieved through better planning and utilisation of existing government office accommodation, the implementation of contemporary fit-outs and better value for money commercial leasing outcomes. For example, lease renegotiation for the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission's office at 111 St Georges Terrace resulted in over \$4 million in savings; the relocation of the Western Australian Electoral Commission from 111 St Georges Terrace to 66 St Georges Terrace resulted in over \$2 million in savings; the relocation of the WA Police Force from 151 Charles Street, Armadale to the new state-owned police complex in Armadale resulted in around \$2 million in savings; and the reduction of office space in Myaree for the Department of Communities resulted in \$1.7 million in savings. They are a few examples.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The parliamentary secretary has a list. Is it possible for that list of how the savings have been achieved to be provided via supplementary information?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I will provide the list of those savings as supplementary information. That will be a breakdown of the \$37.7 million saving outlined in paragraph 3 of the significant issues impacting the agency.

[*Supplementary Information No B13.*]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I will perhaps ask this question under the service summary on page 163 of budget paper No 2. The opposition leader has the media statement in his hand. Where might I find in the budget papers the Department of Finance–led safe and fair reform package? Am I right in thinking that that is something the department is leading?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Can the member refer me to a line item and page number?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am asking the question under the service summary because I cannot find it in the budget. There was a media statement about it and there must be some funding attached to it somewhere; otherwise, it is just a piece of paper with some words on it.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for her question. I think the member is asking about the safe and fair procurement reform. The government is delivering procurement reform to bolster the local building and construction industry for Department of Finance–led construction projects. The safe and fair reform package follows recommendations from the Master Builders Association of Western Australia, the Building and Construction Consultative Committee and Western Australian unions on how to leverage government procurement to achieve better outcomes for builders, subcontractors and workers.

The CHAIR: If I can just stop the parliamentary secretary there, I think the question is: where is that reflected in the budget papers?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is right, chair. I have the media statement that was issued by the minister on 21 May. It very clearly falls within this portfolio, but I could not find any reflection of it in the budget papers. My question is: where is it, so that I can ask a reasonable question?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: That was approved after the budget so it is not in the budget papers.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there any funding associated with that announcement?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Not at the moment.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is it just a media statement? It is a fairly significant statement, parliamentary secretary. I acknowledge that the parliamentary secretary is not the minister, but the release refers to reforms that will change the way the department contracts and improve cash flows for builders. It will be over a period of time. The government has been working with the list of stakeholders that I heard the parliamentary secretary mention, but I also just heard him say that there is no funding in the budget. There is good intent.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I will ask the director general to answer the question.

Ms J. Cant: Yes, it is; it is more than good intent, though. Consultation will begin immediately around it, and we will be doing that within the resources that we have. It will be on a business-as-usual basis, as we look at all our procurement reforms.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 174 of budget paper No 2 and the line item on the foreign buyers surcharge duty. The parliamentary secretary may not be aware of this, but I asked a question on the number of properties subject to this duty. I got an answer back the other day that said that an increasing number of properties have been subject to the foreign buyers duty. That is reflected in the budget papers with the budgeted figure for 2023–24 of \$23 million increasing to \$32 million this year and then climbing even further, to \$36 million, at the end of the out years. Upon what basis is that growth through the out years calculated?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Can I please ask Mr McMahon, the Commissioner of State Revenue, to answer the question.

Mr C. McMahon: The forecasting is conducted by the Department of Treasury in terms of where the estimated figures will be coming through in the out years. More broadly, I suggest it would be in line with the overall property market and the value of transactions going through the market and the expectation that they will continue on as they have been.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The foreign buyers surcharge duty was presumably introduced as a measure to ensure that people did not buy houses and leave them vacant. In line with the actions the government has taken in other areas to free up housing, is an increase in the foreign buyers surcharge being considered as part of those measures to ensure that properties are occupied?

The CHAIR: I am wondering whether that is more a policy question than a financial question, looking at the existing budget.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The existing budget shows that an increasing number of properties are being purchased. I am asking whether that is something the government is concerned about and considering changing.

[8.20 pm]

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I will get Mr McMahon to answer that question, please.

The CHAIR: The appropriate question would have been, and you already have an answer: on what basis is there a predicted increase in the amount of surcharge duty collected? Mr McMahon.

Mr C. McMahon: In terms of the basis that Treasury has factored into its estimates, I do not have the modelling available to me. As I suggested, I believe it would be in line with the current health of the property market but also increasing property prices, which would flow through to increased revenue. For the introduction of the surcharge back in 2019, unlike other jurisdictions, it was not necessarily associated vacancies or property being held vacant. The initial surcharge was introduced as a budget support measure to freezing TAFE fees at that time by the government of the day.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Sorry, I had someone cough in my ear when the commissioner answered the last little bit. What was the last sentence?

Mr C. McMahon: When the foreign buyer surcharge was originally introduced back on 1 January 2019, the purpose of the surcharge was to support a freeze in TAFE fees at that time. It was not necessarily associated with vacancy rates or other purposes at that stage.

Mr R.S. LOVE: On page 174, in the table “Details of Administered Transactions” there are some measures with royalties. Lithium shows a significant variance in the period. It goes from \$1 billion down to \$377 million in the budget year. Is that simply a consequence of the fall in price or is there some other reason for that variance?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for his question. Lithium royalties were unexpectedly high in 2022–23 due to increased lithium prices and volumes, coupled with lower than forecast exchange rates. Lithium prices have significantly fallen due to increasing global supply, resulting in lithium royalties reducing by \$620.6 million, almost 59.5 per cent from 2022–23 to 2023–24. The estimated actual result is \$506.4 million, or 54.5 per cent below the forecast for 2023–24, which assumed the same factors driving the 2022–23 results would persist. A further reduction in royalties of \$44.5 million, or 10.5 per cent, is forecast for 2024–25 before market conditions are expected to improve and drive a moderate increase in prices over the out years.

Mr R.S. LOVE: On the royalties received, the “Petroleum—State Component” has some wild fluctuations in the table. I want to get some clarity on why it is \$16 million and some in the 2022–23 actuals, and in the budget for the current year, it was forecast to be \$9.78 million. It is estimated to come in at \$20 million. In the budget year going forward, we are looking at \$33 million and then at figures roughly at that level across the out years. Can the parliamentary secretary provide some information around that? Is it simply a factor of price or has an increase in a rate or some other arrangement, perhaps with the commonwealth, caused that change?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for his question. Unfortunately, we do not have that information on hand because it is our role to implement policy and the policy lies with Treasury.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Sorry, I did not quite hear the last bit.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: The policy aspect of it lies with Treasury, so we do not have that information or modelling on hand. Our role is to collect or administer the tax. We do not do the modelling, so we are not able to give the member the details. That is a Treasury question.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am not asking for modelling going forward; I am asking for the reasons the royalties collected have changed. Is there any change in the basis with which the royalty has been calculated?

The CHAIR: I think the parliamentary secretary has told you the underlying assumptions are made by Treasury but Mr McMahon looks like he has some information.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Can I please request Mr McMahon to answer.

Mr C. McMahon: Thank you, parliamentary secretary. The details of the administered item are reported under Finance. We have a role in the administration and collection functions of mineral and petroleum royalties. We do not undertake the modelling or forecasting of what those values are and I am unable to respond to the member’s question in terms of the details he is looking for. That may be a question better directed to the Treasurer and perhaps Treasury.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Looking at the expenses component on the same page, I refer to the “Off-the-Plan Duty Rebate Scheme”. The actual in the last year was \$4.7 million. In the current year, the budget is for \$10.4 million but the estimated actual is only \$1.2 million. Can I take it from that that there has actually been very little uptake of the off-the-plan duty rebate scheme? Looking at the budget this year, there is a mere \$500 000, which is not a huge amount. Can the parliamentary secretary give me some understanding of where that scheme is situated and, in the out years, why is there nothing beyond 2026–27? Will that be the end of the scheme?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I request Mr McMahon to answer this.

Mr C. McMahon: Thank you, parliamentary secretary. Perhaps a little bit of background regarding the off-the-plan concession and rebate. When the off-the-plan rebate was first announced in 2019, it was an actual rebate of duty paid that the purchaser could obtain after settlement had occurred. As part of the 2023–24 budget, the rebate was converted to a concession and is now applied up-front as part of the assessment. The reduction in that item is just showing we will be moving away from the rebate payment and it will be picked up through up-front concessions available to buyers.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank you. That was a helpful explanation of that matter. In that same table, I refer to the first home owner scheme, where we again see some fluctuations. There is a budget in the current year of \$34.6 million, with a likely outcome of \$39 million of expenditure, but a much higher figure of \$54 million is budgeted for this year and it is even higher in the out years. I know a slight change to that scheme is going through legislation at the moment. I imagine the underlying assumption of that increase would be an increase in the number of applications. Could the parliamentary secretary give me some idea of what he anticipates the number of applications to be this year and in the subsequent years?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I request Mr McMahon to answer that question.

The CHAIR: Mr McMahon, you are popular tonight.

Mr C. McMahon: Thank you, parliamentary secretary. The first home owner scheme relates to the \$10 000 grant that is payable on new builds. The amendments that are currently before Parliament relate to the duty concession for established homes. Established homes do not qualify for the grant. In terms of numbers, that line item equates to roughly 5 400 grants to be paid this year.

[8.30 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: The department is looking at 7 100, 8 200 and so on in subsequent years. Is that what we are looking at there?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Mr McMahon.

Mr C. McMahon: That is correct. That indicates an increase in the number of first home owner grants to be paid on newly constructed homes going into the out years. I would suggest that the numbers are starting to return more to normal going into 2024–25 and the out years, dealing with what was partially a bring forward of interest in the first home owner grant that would have been associated with the stimulus arrangements around housing construction.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I came in late so this question may have already been asked. I refer to the first significant issue impacting the agency, which refers to attracting more contractors to the state. Has that —

The CHAIR: I think tangentially, yes.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I could perhaps ask a question and if it is completely over the top or has been asked before, the chair can shut me down.

The CHAIR: I will do that if I need to. Member for Moore.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The aim of this exercise is to increase the contracted capacity in the state. The budget refers to attracting more contractors to the state for the long term and identifying options to increase the capacity of local tier 2 operators.

The CHAIR: Does the parliamentary secretary have a page reference?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Can the member reference the page and line item?

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is the first significant issue impacting the agency on page 162, as I said when I started. The line item refers to needing to extend or increase the number of contractors available to the state in the long term and identify options to increase the capacity of local tier 2 operators. Can the parliamentary secretary explain what a tier 2 contractor is?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I request the director general to answer.

Ms J. Cant: Tier 2 operators are the smaller builders. Over the last few years in this state, tier 1 operators have included Multiplex. Tier 2 operators are the smaller builders that usually target that \$50 million to \$150 million range.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Why is the government trying to increase the capacity of local tier 2 operators? Has there been a loss of contractors or some other change? Perhaps some have moved to another tier—I do not know. Why do we need more tier 2 operators?

The CHAIR: There are two questions there. There could be a third question; that is, is it due to an increase in demand?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Can I please request the DG to answer the question.

Ms J. Cant: The capacity work is about attracting more tier 1s into the state. In the last few years, we have really relied on a single tier 1 in this state. To enable us to do that, it is about helping the tier 2s do the more complex work, so looking at how we procure, how we bundle our works and how we bring it to market to encourage more competition in that area. I guess it is that slow build of confidence on the size of projects that are being delivered. From our perspective, the more of them in the market that are doing it well, the better it is for industry and government.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Would the tier 2 operators that the government is trying to encourage into the state be available for government contracts? The Department of Finance administers a number of builds, but I take it that it does not

administer all government builds. In other committees, we have been hearing about the lack of builders, especially in regional areas. Is the lack of tier 2 contractors in regional areas to build \$30 million, \$40 million or \$50 million hospitals and buildings, which seem to be continually delayed under this government, an area of concern for the Department of Finance?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: We all know that there have been issues with construction delays and the number of people who are able to complete projects. That is why there is a tier 1 and tier 2 expansion to get interstate and international construction companies involved in the process. I will get the director general to elaborate further.

Ms J. Cant: The short answer to the question is yes, the regions are definitely in the scope of that work. When we are talking about tier 2s, we are talking to some that operate outside the state, but we are also talking to local tier 2s.

Mr R.S. LOVE: How much interplay and oversight does the department have over the builds in, say, the department of housing or health services? Is there any role for the Department of Finance and its procurement services in those builds? Can the parliamentary secretary explain how that works?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I will ask the director general to answer the question.

Ms J. Cant: Generally, the Department of Finance is responsible for non-residential builds in government, excluding things in the transport infrastructure space. We do not build trains, roads, bridges and ports. We certainly build, on behalf of client agencies, hospitals, prisons and art galleries across the state.

Mr R.S. LOVE: When the Minister for Health explains—I will not be too political—or states that a hospital in Tom Price, Meekatharra, Mullewa or Laverton, or the renal dialysis centre in Halls Creek, cannot be built because of a lack of capacity, does advice come from the Department of Finance that the Department of Health should not build those facilities?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Can I clarify whether the member is asking about workforce capacity or construction capability capacity?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am asking about construction capacity, as has been claimed by the Minister for Health with each of those projects and citing that as a reason for the delay in the carriage of those projects. In relation to that, I am asking whether that advice comes from the Department of Finance.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: We are all aware of the construction delays and strains on the market. The government is taking multiple measures to ease those. I will get the director general to elaborate further.

Ms J. Cant: I am not going to comment on what the Minister for Health may or may not have said, but on behalf of the Department of Finance, our role as a central agency, alongside the Department of Treasury, is to look at the pipeline of works, take things to procurement and provide advice to government. We do not say that our word is what something will or will not be built on. We provide advice to government on what is best for the state.

[8.40 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: Has the department provided advice to the Department of Health about the timing of the projects that I just outlined—the hospitals in Meekatharra, Tom Price, Mullewa and Laverton?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I will ask the director general to take the question.

Ms J. Cant: Yes, we have provided some advice to the Department of Health on those projects.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Would that advice be able to be supplied to members?

Ms J. Cant: The advice is provided confidentially to the Minister for Health, so I think it is unlikely but the member could put a request through to the Department of Health.

The CHAIR: I have a short question, with the indulgence of everyone. It deals with the emergency services levy. That is reflected in the budget of the Department of Emergency Services rather than the budget of the Department of Finance.

In relation to Finance and the emergency services levy, I understand that the amount payable by individual householders relates to the gross rental value of the property. That is the way the calculation is made. Is it the case that more householders are now reaching the threshold because of the gross rental values going up across the board?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I will ask Mr McMahon to answer.

Mr C. McMahon: I do not have any information regarding numbers that may be closing in on the maximum of the amount for the emergency services levy. I do apologise.

The CHAIR: That is fine. Thank you.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 8.42 to 8.53 pm

Division 16: Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety — Service 3, Commerce —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Dr J. Krishnan, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Commerce.

Mr R. Sellers, Director General.

Mr J. Kwong, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr S. Abdoolakhan, Acting Deputy Director General, Industry Regulation and Consumer Protection.

Ms P. Blake, Executive Director, Consumer Protection.

[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. I 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.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My first question is on the first line item, “Approvals Reform—Cross-Government Triage Team”, under the headings “Spending Changes” and “New Initiatives” on page 234. Can the parliamentary secretary outline what the cross-government triage team is and what is its purpose?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Thank you for the question, member. Unfortunately, that is not part of this portfolio. I will get the director general to expand.

The CHAIR: For our information, whose portfolio is it?

Mr R. Sellers: We dealt with it in Minister Michael’s session under the environmental regulation part of the portfolio.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will try something else. I refer to the short-term rental accommodation incentive scheme on page 234 under the heading “New Initiatives”. There is no money for this scheme after this financial year. Will the scheme be non-existent in the next financial year?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I request Ms Blake to answer the question.

Ms P. Blake: Thank you, parliamentary secretary, and chair. Yes, this is a finite-funded initiative. It is funded for the current financial year 2023–24 and into 2024–25.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many renters at this point in time have taken up this scheme?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Thank you for the question, member. We have received a total of 306 applications, and 172 payments have been made. The total number of properties added to the long-term market is 172.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, parliamentary secretary. How many renters does the parliamentary secretary expect to access this scheme by the end of the funding?

The CHAIR: How long is a piece of string, really?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: It is very difficult to assess the exact number of people who will be on the scheme. It has worked so far. Every additional property that has been put on the market is a bonus for people. The government has taken up multiple initiatives to ease the rental market. We are seeing some short-term results in the initial stages and we hope things will improve. I will get Ms Blake to expand further on this.

Ms P. Blake: At the moment, the scheme will run through until November this year. We anticipate having between 250 and 300 by that stage and then it will be a question for government about what we will do with that scheme.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 234 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. My question is around the election commitment for the building and construction consultative committee that is listed under “Other” in the table of spending changes. The line item for the consultative committee allocates \$250 000 this year and for each of the out years. What is the purpose of that committee?

[9.00 pm]

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for his question, but this relates to the industrial relations portfolio, not commerce.

Mr R.S. LOVE: How can a committee made up of all the builders in the state, who are talking about getting procurement and building underway, be industrial relations?

The CHAIR: Given that it is another portfolio, I think that should almost be rhetorical, member.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am not certain how it could be in another portfolio.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: This is across a portfolio budget involving industrial relations and the Department of Finance when it comes to procurement. I will get the deputy director general to explain further on this.

Mr S. Abdoolakhan: As the parliamentary secretary said, this matter sits in the industrial relations portfolio. It is not within the commerce portfolio. The member's question about the procurement side of things relates to something outside the portfolio. My understanding is that the Department of Finance and other departments were actively involved in the process for that committee, but it does not sit within the commerce portfolio.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Further to that, the committee can understand our frustration. The member for Central Wheatbelt asked about the new procurement processes in the previous section and was told that there was nothing in the budget for it, yet here we find that very procedure being mentioned in what we thought was the commerce area, but now find it is in yet another area. One would think, on the face of it, that a procurement committee dealing with contractors would either be in the commerce or finance area, not in industrial relations. This is very confusing.

The CHAIR: Member, I am not sure, in relation to finance, that they were specifically asked about the building and construction consultative committee. Finance did say that they were the procurement gurus, or words to that effect, so I am not quite sure why there is an issue now.

Mr R.S. LOVE: My point was that the parliamentary secretary said that there were no expenditures connected to that announcement and yet we see that there is four years of investment for that very matter in the department, if not in that particular portfolio. He does sit in both camps.

The CHAIR: Yes, I know that, member. I am pretty feeble-minded on occasions, but I do not remember specific questions about that particular committee, and the member has not been here the whole time. Frankly, it is rhetorical since it is in a different division. Next question.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Okay. We will move on as best as we can given the confusion that seems to exist.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Only on your part. Everyone else knows what is going on.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I do not believe so. I think we have done our best to actually ask about this system and in both cases, we have not been given an answer.

The CHAIR: All right. There is always questions on notice.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: You have done your best and come up short.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I do not need advice from a retiring member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Let us move on. New question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will ask a new question. Page 234 refers to the line item "Vacant Property Rental Incentive Scheme", which we see has a \$5 million allocation in the 2024–25 budget year. Once again, is there a plan for this to be available only in the forthcoming year?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: The vacant property rental incentive scheme is similar to the short-term rental incentive scheme, but it specifically targets vacant properties. This initiative targets those properties that have been vacant for at least six months to offer them on the long-term rental market for a minimum 12 months' lease. Owners can receive a \$5 000 grant if the property meets the conditions. The reason that this incentive grant is \$5 000 and the short-term incentive grant is \$10 000 is that the short-term rental incentive needs to account for the fact that the properties are already earning an income as short-term rentals. The \$5 000 offered in the vacant properties scheme is designed to cover the cost of getting a house prepared and listed on the market. The short-term incentive grant is also budgeted for this year and can be reviewed at the end of the year.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many landowners have taken up this financial incentive at this time?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: We have so far received 46 applications and they are all currently under assessment. As I said before, every property available for rent on the market is contributing to easing the pressure on the rental market. The government is taking multiple initiatives to ease the pressure, and this is one of the initiatives.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many landowners does the parliamentary secretary expect to take up the offer?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: It is very hard to say because there is a difference in having a property vacant. The incentive now is to do the necessary works like repairing the lawns, doing a little bit of renovation, and getting the property ready for the rental market, which many people who are expected to make the decision would not have wanted to do. It is very hard to predict what the numbers are going to be, but I will request Ms Blake to explain further.

The CHAIR: Ms Blake.

Ms P. Blake: Thank you, parliamentary secretary. An allocation has been calculated on 1 000 grants being made, and \$5 000 per tenancy gives us \$5 million.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I assume, if the parliamentary secretary could confirm it, that should the full 1 000 grants for this program not be taken up, the government will carry it forward to the following financial year to fill out the \$5 million. Would that be the parliamentary secretary's anticipation?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: It will be the policy that is decided at the end of the uptake as to how good and effective the entire process has been.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Page 240 refers to the service area of Industry Regulation and Consumer Protection, and the role of the department in the building, building surveying, electrical, gas, painting, and plumbing industries. Something that has been raised a number of times with me in the past, parliamentary secretary, is the fact that plumbers coming into the state wanting to get professional qualifications recognised in Western Australia have to travel to Brisbane to undertake a process of qualification because there is nowhere in Western Australia that does it. I do not know whether this has been solved in very recent times but I was told that not that long ago. Has that situation been resolved or is that still the situation now?

[9.10 pm]

The CHAIR: I suspect that the accreditation might be another portfolio, but we will wait and see. It is in the pipeline, member.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I can confirm that there are training organisations that provide that service, but sometimes there is no steady flow of that particular skill set moving into the state, and the demand for that service is not there. On those rare occasions, they are not able to provide the service and people are having to travel.

The CHAIR: Perhaps you can confirm: is that your portfolio, parliamentary secretary?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Yes.

The CHAIR: It is! Fire away.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank goodness; we found out what they do!

I will move on with the description there of building and building surveying.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: What is the page number?

The CHAIR: It is the same one. It is page 240.

Mr R.S. LOVE: We are on the same page; it is the same service provision area on page 240.

The CHAIR: Industry regulation and consumer protection.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, under the heading "Industry Regulation and Consumer Protection". In relation to both those matters, the process of introducing compulsory building inspections for residential buildings has been discussed. Could the parliamentary secretary outline to me whether the government plans to develop compulsory building inspections for residential builds; and, if so, when might that be introduced?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I kept a briefing note. There has been a lot of pressure on the construction industry as such, and there have been delays. Building a home is a significant event for every Western Australian, and delays cause immense stress on top of whatever other stress they go through. It is not the government's intention to introduce mandatory inspections in a rapid fashion. There is a plan to implement in a phased manner. The WA government has been progressing the implementation of the recommendations of the national *Building confidence* report to build confidence and improve the effectiveness of compliance and enforcement systems for the building and construction industry across Western Australia.

Stage 1 of the implementation is engineer registration. The first stage of the review considered the registration of building discipline engineers. In July 2022, following extensive industry consultation, the government announced the establishment of a statutory registration scheme for building discipline engineers and the necessary amendments to regulations were made in June 2023. The registration scheme will commence on 1 July 2024 for structural and fire safety building engineers, with registrations becoming mandatory from 1 July 2026. The registration scheme will commence on 1 July 2025 for civil and mechanical building engineers, with registrations becoming mandatory from 1 July 2027. The government committed funding in the budget to meet the anticipated costs of implementing and enforcing the registration scheme.

Stage 2 is building controls. The second stage of the review focused on regulatory control measures spanning the entire construction process, targeted at ensuring greater compliance with building standards and improving outcomes for building owners and occupants. Extensive industry consultation has been undertaken, and in December 2023, cabinet endorsed a suite of reforms detailed in the *Decision regulatory impact statement: Building better: Reforms to WA's building regulatory framework*. The most significant of this suite of reforms is the establishment of

requirements for inspections to be carried out at key stages during the construction process. These requirements will apply to non-residential buildings such as office buildings, shopping centres, hospitals, schools and apartment buildings in the first instance. With respect to apartment buildings, inspection requirements will first apply to medium to high-rise buildings greater than three storeys before being extended to low-rise buildings three storeys or fewer. Further extension of inspection requirements to houses will be considered in the future once the current proposed requirements have been implemented and their effectiveness evaluated. Other reforms detailed in the *Better building* DRIS include increasing minimum design and variation documentation requirements, mandating greater independence of building surveyors, announcing regulator powers and satisfying builder registration requirements. The Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety is working with the Parliamentary Counsel's Office to draft a bill to amend the existing laws to give effect to these reforms. A consultation draft of the bill will be released for public comment. The government is aiming for the consultation draft to be released in the second half of 2024. Once the bill is finalised, it will be possible for DEMIRS to closely estimate the associated implementation timeframe.

Stage 3—the last stage—is fire safety practitioner and building designer registration. The third stage of the review will consider the establishment of statutory registration schemes for fire safety practitioners and building designers. Options to be considered will look to complement existing registration schemes—for example, the electrical and plumbing trade registration schemes in relation to fire safety practitioners and the architect registration scheme in relation to building designers. DEMIRS is currently developing consultation strategies and associated materials for these reviews. A submission seeking the minister's approval to commence the review of the fire safety practitioners was provided to the minister's office in April 2024. A submission seeking the minister's approval to commence the review for building designers is expected to be provided to the minister in the second half of 2024.

In summary, we acknowledge the national *Building confidence* report. We acknowledge that changes have to be implemented. We also acknowledge that the construction industry is under a lot of strain, and we cannot bring drastic changes that will put further strain on the industry and cause more problems with the completion of houses. As I mentioned earlier, building a home is a significant event in a person's life, and we do not want to add stress to that by implementing drastic policies. That is why it is staged to start with four-storey or higher commercial buildings, and then three storeys and lower, and finally coming to single-storey buildings. It will be a phased-manner implementation and it will be done.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Does the parliamentary secretary have any idea of the number of inspectors that will need to be recruited and trained to fully implement the final stages of that program? Perhaps along the way the parliamentary secretary can give an indication of the different stages.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Can I please direct the deputy director general to answer that question.

Mr S. Abdoolakhan: Thank you, parliamentary secretary. As the member mentioned, we are taking a phased approach. Firstly, we will look at multistorey, high-rise buildings, and how many people we will need to do the work. We have done some modelling. The inspections that we are proposing will not be done by inspectors engaged by the department. We are looking at having the capacity in the sector. I think a question was asked about the number of building surveyors needed to do the work. I think it is widely acknowledged that if we were to put the whole burden of inspections on the number of building surveyors we currently have in WA, which is around 5 000, we would not be able to do the work. That is why we are taking a phased implementation approach, ensuring that we have capacity in the sector and bringing engineers under that same umbrella. Although building surveyors will be the main people who will be signing off on documents, under our legislation, we will be able to delegate some inspection work to engineers with specialist skills to do the work. If it is a structural matter, it will be a structural engineer and for fire, it will be the fire engineer. The whole strategy of a phased approach is to bring more capacity to the sector, not to put an extra burden on building surveyors and expect them to give a source of truth or knowledge or expect these on everything; hence, building engineers being the first cab off the rank.

[9.20 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: In order to enable coverage throughout the whole state, would the parliamentary secretary consider involving inspectors in local governments around the state to assist in areas that do not have a volume of work that would warrant an inspector being stationed in the local area full time? Would that be envisaged?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I can definitely assure the member that all that has been taken into consideration in the capacity planning to make sure that the entirety of WA is covered and we are not putting additional strain on the construction industry as such. I will ask the deputy director general to expand further on that.

Mr S. Abdoolakhan: Thank you, parliamentary secretary. That is 100 per cent. The system of approval for buildings relies on local government being actively involved in the process. There are two different pathways. There is one pathway with private certification whereby approval is done by a private building surveyor, but in regional areas, mostly local government is involved doing the work, so the plan is to share that work with all the parties involved. We are the closest in the shire; we know more about the vagaries, if you like, of a specific issue of that particular shire. We know better. The plan is to involve them in that whole process definitely.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Has any modelling been done on the cost impact on each of the builds from the new regime that is to be introduced?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Extensive modelling has been done on a cost–benefit analysis to the community that clearly indicates that once the policies have been implemented and mandatory inspections are in place, that is a cost saving to the community compared with not maintaining those standards.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am obliged for the answer, but in terms of each individual build, has the parliamentary secretary any idea what it might add to the cost of the build?

The CHAIR: With respect, I think that is not specific enough, because you could be talking about a 23-storey building or a four-storey building. You would expect the extension cost would be —

Mr R.S. LOVE: Okay, I will rephrase that. On a single residential development, could the parliamentary secretary give me an idea of what the new regime when fully implemented might add to the cost of the build?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: We are not just taking costs into consideration. As we said, the modelling was done based on cost–benefit analysis. The benefit to the end consumer on a single-storey building is definitely positive with implementation of the policy. I would like the deputy director general to expand on that.

Mr S. Abdoolakhan: Thank you, parliamentary secretary. Member, two volumes of the *Decision Regulatory Impact Statement* were published—volumes 1 and 2. Volume 2 has a very detailed cost–benefit analysis undertaken by a private party. I do not have all the figures at the tip of my fingers, but they are all in the public domain. All the different cost implications of inspections, engaging engineers and everything has been factored into it and there are different line items. I do not have them handy, but they are all in the public domain. Regarding what the parliamentary secretary mentioned earlier, we have looked at all the costs and benefits and seen where the cost benefit stacks up over the life of a building, with a net benefit to implementing all this reform, as long as it is done in a staged manner and everything is not front loaded in the first stage of implementation.

The CHAIR: I have a further question on this, parliamentary secretary. I was told a few years ago—the situation might have changed—that one can call oneself a fire safety practitioner in Western Australia and there were no standards or accreditation available in Western Australia. Has that situation changed and is there an accrediting body?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I request the deputy director general to answer.

Mr S. Abdoolakhan: The third stage of our review, which the parliamentary secretary mentioned earlier, we will always review. It is not as loose as some people have said. Training schemes are available, but there is no registration scheme for fire safety practitioners as we stand. The registration scheme is currently loose. We do not prescribe a different type of fire safety designer, which engineer registration will capture. The next step of a review is looking at the registration of fire safety installers, because there are plumbers who can do some fire safety work and there are electricians who design and are competent. We want to put some rigour in the process. That is why we are initiating a holistic review of the fire safety practitioner side of things in the next stage of a reform.

The CHAIR: Is that seen as a priority? When is it anticipated that the fire safety inspection regime will be completed?

Mr S. Abdoolakhan: It is not about the inspection of work. Inspection of an electrical component of a fire installation is already happening through building and electrical inspectors. It is about putting more rigour into the registration of people who are designing the work and plumbers who specialise in doing the plumbing side of fire safety installations.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 235 and paragraph 4 about the Short-Term Rental Accommodation Act 2024 and the STRA registration scheme, as it is known on the opposite page. I understand that the register and the legislation has only just come in, but I am concerned about where the funding will go. On the opposite page is the line item “STRA Registration Scheme”, starting at \$1.5 million in the forthcoming year and down to around \$900 000 a year after that. Is that registration scheme going to be maintained by a central register or partially by local governments?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: The act requires all premises that fall within the scope of the definition of short-term rental accommodation to be registered. If a property is not registered, the accommodation provider will not be permitted to advertise or enter into a short-term rental arrangement. The short-term rental accommodation registration scheme was expected to commence from 1 July 2024, with a six-month transition period until registration becomes mandatory from 1 January 2025.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am trying to get to whether the register will be held and controlled at the Department of Commerce rather than in some spread of local governments or the like.

[9.30 pm]

Dr J. KRISHNAN: My understanding is that it will be centrally managed by the Department of Commerce. I will get Ms Blake to further expand on that.

Ms P. Blake: Yes, it will be a central register that is managed by the Consumer Protection division within the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 8 on page 235 of budget paper No 2 on the forthcoming prohibition on the use of engineered stone. It states, in part —

WorkSafe has significant activity underway, including national discussions on implementing the ban, stakeholder briefings, regulatory changes for engineered stone and other silica-containing products.

Can the parliamentary secretary tell me what that significant activity is? What will happen to the businesses that were producing that engineered stone? What is the plan for them?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: This question needs to be directed to the industrial relations minister, Minister McGurk. I understand that this question was asked this morning and was answered in detail.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Wrong place.

The CHAIR: You will have to find your slab somewhere else.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will start a new question. I refer to the heading “Protecting Workers and Supporting Consumers” on page 235 of budget paper No 2. Paragraph 9 relates to the agricultural industry. How many inspectors will be hired specifically for the agricultural industry in relation to this?

The CHAIR: Is that your portfolio, parliamentary secretary?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: No, chair; sorry.

The CHAIR: Just stick to the script; it might be better!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I went through the list and took both of them out.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. He never gave it to me.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I did!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: There has been a breakdown in the chain!

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Division in the ranks.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is all right; we will move on.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: We are a small and well-oiled machine.

The CHAIR: It is helping with the stats.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Let us move on to page 235 of budget paper No 2 and paragraph 5 on labour hire changes. I am sure that one is in the right section.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: No; sorry, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: No good? No problem.

The CHAIR: Maybe government members might have a Dorothy Dixier.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Sorry; I was doing something else.

The CHAIR: Member for Moore, I have one if you want any.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I just want to take up the situation with industry regulation and consumer protection regarding payment disputes.

The CHAIR: Sorry, where are we looking?

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is on the same page that I was on before. I am referring to the heading “Industry Regulation and Consumer Protection” on page 240 of budget paper No 2. Has there been any development in terms of the resolution that might be available to consumers with regard to home indemnity insurance if they are involved in a situation in which their builder has not actually gone to the wall but has just not shown up and they cannot get their house completed? I know that people faced a lot of different scenarios over the very difficult period when so many builders were going under. Has there been some smoothing of the path for people to be able to access insurance and get on with their build in another way if the builder is simply not doing the build, rather than perhaps having actually gone into bankruptcy?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for his question. The current balance of the home indemnity insurance account as of 2 May 2024 was \$45.9 million. Between 1 June and 26 April 2024, 1 956 claims were made. Of those, 277 have been settled at greater than \$100 000. These 277 consumers would all have been left with significant losses if the government had not increased the maximum cover available to home owners. Since the maximum payout amount was doubled, as of 22 April 2024, 117 claims had been settled in which consumers suffered losses in excess of the \$200 000 limit. The total amount of losses incurred by these consumers was \$10 million.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 1 on page 234 of budget paper No 2 and the reform of the Residential Tenancies Act 1987. Can the parliamentary secretary enlighten us on whether the Commissioner for Consumer Protection

will be required to make a few new determinations in relation to bond disputes and, of course, pets and minor modifications as per the legislation? Is there an allowance for an increase in FTE for the Commissioner for Consumer Protection?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank the member for his question. An amount of \$8.9 million over the budgeted forward years will be invested for the implementation of commissioner's determination and dispute resolution functions on commencement of the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act 2024. It includes 12 FTE on an ongoing basis.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Within what timeframe will those new FTEs be scaled into the department, given that this is fresh legislation that has gone through?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: It is estimated that 12 FTE will be employed in the 2024–25 financial year and continue in the forward years.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am going to be adventurous and see whether I have the right area. I refer to paragraph 2 under the key government reforms on page 234. I assume that this is the area in which we are seeing some changes in the Ombudsman's area in dealing with the energy disputes et cetera. Are they related to service area 3 of this division as well; and, if so, how do they intersect?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Sorry, chair; this is a question for the Minister for Energy, not the Minister for Commerce.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Okay.

The CHAIR: Do not buy a lotto ticket this week, member.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I was just wondering because it is also to do with the faults, which could also be private contractors, but that is fine.

The CHAIR: While opposition members are thinking about whether they have any more questions, I have a quick one, parliamentary secretary. At both pages 235 and 240, there is the heading "Protecting Workers and Supporting Consumers". Although there is no reference in the budget papers, I want to ask about the second tranche of the Retirement Villages Act. It comes within this portfolio; it is akin to the short-term rental accommodation legislation and the residential tenancies legislation. The Department of Commerce has done multiple consultation papers. At what stage can we anticipate some legislation?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I ask Ms Blake to answer.

Ms P. Blake: Thank you, parliamentary secretary. A consultation draft of the bill has been shared with key stakeholders. We anticipate a bill being introduced into Parliament in the second half of this year.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Any other questions, members? No; that is it.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The white flag is up.

The CHAIR: The white flag is up. Thank you, parliamentary secretary, and thank you, advisers.

The appropriation was recommended.

Committee adjourned at 9.40 pm
