

Division 40: Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, \$3 831 000 —

Ms J.M. Freeman, Chairman.

Mrs L.M. Harvey, Minister for Police representing the Attorney General.

Ms J. Perkins, Acting Commissioner for Equal Opportunity.

Mr M. Connolly, Chief of Staff, Office of the Attorney General.

The CHAIRMAN: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day.

It is the intention of the Chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. It will greatly assist Hansard if members can give these details in preface to their question.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information she agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by Friday, 3 June 2016. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice with the Clerk's office.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Maylands.

Ms L.L. BAKER: I refer to page 472 and to the appropriation for the Equal Opportunity Commission. It is evident from the appropriation that there has been a staff reduction. Can the minister provide the current number of full-time equivalents and the expected number of FTE for the next 12 months?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I will ask Ms Perkins to respond.

Ms J. Perkins: Yes. The agency has undertaken a restructure of staff, which will result in a reduction of 4.5 FTE. The restructure will be implemented on 1 July. The focus of the restructure has been to mainstream the management of the organisation, so we will be reducing from five to three separate areas of management. The focus has also been on preserving our direct hands-on support for our primary function around conciliation and community education in order to maximise our capacity in that area.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Can the minister tell me what areas have gone, and give some examples; for instance, has the women's information and referral and support service gone?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I will ask Ms Perkins to respond.

Ms J. Perkins: We have not abolished any areas in that context. Previously, conciliation and community education were two separate areas, under two separate managers. We have brought those two areas together under one manager. That will create the opportunity for better information to come through in the complaints and conciliation space to inform where we set our priorities in our community education area. That is one example. We have also brought under one manager, in what is now the Office of the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, our legal function, and our policy and evaluation function, whereas previously there were separate managers for those two areas.

Mr P. ABETZ: I refer to expenses on page 472. The budget for 2015–16 for total cost of services was \$3.777 million, and the estimated actual was roughly an extra \$1 million. That is a significant cost overrun, if I am reading that correctly. In light of that, how much has been spent to date on producing, printing, publishing and distributing the commission's "Guidelines for supporting sexual and gender diversity in schools"?

Ms L.L. BAKER: Good luck with that one!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I will ask Ms Perkins to respond.

Ms J. Perkins: From my understanding, those guidelines were launched in 2014–15. We distributed over 1 000 copies on demand to a range of public and private sector schools and other organisations. We have not printed any new guidelines in 2015–16; they are available on our web page.

Mr P. ABETZ: Is that a cost overrun in the budget?

Ms J. Perkins: Not at all. The funding comprises \$600 000 to cover the cost of separation payments for members of our staff who will be leaving us, plus \$581 000 to cover what has been an ongoing shortfall in the commission's budget over the last few years. That is primarily attributed to increases in 2010 in the cost of accommodation.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to government goals and desired outcomes on page 473 of the *Budget Statements*. Can the minister provide the number of complaints that have been made about age discrimination in employment?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I will ask Ms Perkins to respond, if she is able.

Ms J. Perkins: As at 31 March, we had received 25 complaints under the age discrimination category. I cannot provide information at this stage as to whether that is older age or younger age. We project that we will get a total of 33 complaints by the end of the year.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I apologise, but I did not hear that.

Ms J. Perkins: The number of complaints was 25 as of 31 March, broadly under the issue of age discrimination.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is the agency seeing any trend? Is the number of complaints in that area increasing or decreasing?

Ms J. Perkins: In 2014–15, a total of 53 complaints were made in relation to age, so the number has decreased slightly.

Mr P. ABETZ: I refer to the service “Avenue of Redress for Unlawful Discrimination and Unreasonable Treatment” on page 474. How many complaints on the grounds of sexual orientation has the commission received in the last year or two, or for whatever period the commission has statistics, and how many of those complaints were subject to some kind of mediation and processing by the commissioner?

[4.50 pm]

Ms J. Perkins: To date, this year under that category of sexual orientation we have received complaints from 12 individuals. I do not have access to the information on the outcome of those complaints at this stage.

Mr P. ABETZ: How much staff time and other resources did the commission use in supporting the WA AIDS Council in its submission to be the WA partner in the national Safe Schools Coalition to deliver services in Western Australia?

Ms L.L. BAKER: You are just outrageous.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: My understanding is that the Equal Opportunity Commission does not assign staff hours to each individual inquiry. I do not know that that level of specificity would be available to us, but I will ask Ms Perkins whether it is possible to drill down to an hour-by-hour cost analysis of each individual complaint.

Ms J. Perkins: No, I do not have the ability to provide that information.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Southern River, I know that members want to move on. We can move on on the basis that the majority want to do so and I have been instructed by people to move on. I will give you one last question and then we will move on.

Mr P. ABETZ: I noticed there was a lot of emphasis given in the work of the commission to sexual discrimination and so on, but 65 per cent of all bullying in our schools relates to body issues—that is the biggest one—then grades and marks that people get, and then racial background. Are there any plans to provide guidelines to schools for addressing those particular issues of discrimination?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I will ask Ms Perkins to respond, but my understanding is that the responsibility to address bullying and harassment in schools lies with the Department of Education, and the Equal Opportunity Commission consults with that department and provides advice about its resources on how to counter all manner of bullying action and harassment in schools. With respect to those complaints of sexual harassment, though, it is a separate area and there certainly are complaints of sexual harassment in the workplace that the Equal Opportunity Commission investigates. Unfortunately, people still experience that even in 2016. Could Ms Perkins please elaborate whether the Equal Opportunity Commission has a responsibility to provide those resources to schools or whether it acts more in an advisory capacity to the Department of Education around those policies?

Mr P. ABETZ: My question addressed education, but the workplace would also be of interest.

Ms J. Perkins: We do not have any immediate plans to undertake further work in that space with Education in particular. I would make the point that the top three grounds for complaint that we receive, which have been fairly consistent over the last few years, would be impairment, race and sexual harassment, and I think they will

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Ms Lisa Baker; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Peter Abetz; Ms Margaret Quirk

be areas we will be focusing on in the coming year in terms of working with a number of providers to provide information and support in that space.

The appropriation was recommended.