

Division 1: Parliament, \$41 342 000 —

Ms D.J. Guise, Chairman.

Mr F. Riebeling, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr P.J. McHugh, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr J.D. Mandy, Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr R. Bremner, Executive Manager, Parliamentary Services.

Mr M.D. Crouche, Chief Finance Officer, Parliamentary Services.

The CHAIRMAN: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard staff. The daily proof *Hansard* will be published at 9.00 am tomorrow.

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. This is the prime focus of the committee. Although there is scope for members to examine many matters, questions need to be clearly related to a page number, item, program, or amount within the volumes. For example, members are free to pursue performance indicators which are included in the budget statements while there remains a clear link between the questions and the estimates. It is the intention of the Chairman 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 Speaker may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. For the purpose of following up the provision of this information, I ask the Speaker to clearly indicate to the committee which supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the Speaker's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the committee clerk by 6 June 2008, so that members may read it before the report and third reading stages. If the supplementary information cannot be provided within that time, written advice is required of the day by which the information will be made available. Details in relation to supplementary information have been provided to both members and advisers, and, accordingly, I ask the Speaker to cooperate with those requirements.

I caution members that if the Speaker 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. Only supplementary information that the Speaker agrees to provide will be sought by 6 June 2008.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I refer to page 51 of the *Budget Statements* and the second dot point under the Legislative Council that refers to the appointment of a media and public relations officer to develop public awareness etc—a challenging job. My question is whether there is any intention to make a similar appointment for the Legislative Assembly; and, indeed, if there was to be the appointment of a public relations officer, why was that not applied across the whole of the Parliament?

The CHAIRMAN: The Speaker is unable to answer questions regarding the Council, but I am sure if there is an appropriate way the member can reword that in terms of the Assembly, he will be able to answer.

The SPEAKER: I have no intention of making such an appointment. I do not know why the Council has done that. It seems to be an amazing appointment, but that is the Council's business.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Is there no intent to make a similar appointment to the Assembly?

The SPEAKER: No.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: Point of order.

The SPEAKER: We do, of course, run the education program out of the Assembly.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Yes.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: If the Speaker is unable to answer questions of that nature, although I understand why he is not able to do so, at what stage will we have an opportunity to have those sorts of questions answered?

The SPEAKER: Is that in relation to the Council?

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: Yes, with regard to the Council.

The SPEAKER: That is through its estimates committee system. I think it has a permanent standing committee that does that work.

The CHAIRMAN: But it is not through our budget estimates process, member for Kalgoorlie.

Chairman; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Paul Andrews; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Day; Mr John Hyde; Mr Tony Simpson

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I turn to page 56 of the *Budget Statements* and the first dot point at the bottom under significant issues and trends that refers to the continuing pressure on parliamentary committees resulting in increased competition for existing committees. I have a question regarding the committee process in the Assembly and generally in Parliament. Has there been much talk over the years about building our own facilities instead of paying rent in West Perth for those two buildings?

The SPEAKER: Before I answer that, I will answer the question from the member for Kalgoorlie. It may pay the member for Kalgoorlie to get somebody to put his question on notice to the upper house because it does not necessarily examine the Legislative Council's budget in its budget estimates. It does not have an estimates hearing like this.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: It just seems odd that we have the Council and the Assembly lumped into the one area, yet we can ask only 50 per cent of the questions.

The SPEAKER: The only way the member for Kalgoorlie will get an answer is really through questions on notice in the Council.

In relation to building more buildings here, it is a long-held dream that we have our own annexe, I suppose, which would solve a number of problems for both staff and committees; and, of course, it would save us rent in the long term. However, we are looking at \$40 million to \$50 million for that sort of project, which is something I cannot foresee being provided in the medium term. We have endeavoured in the past seven to eight years to improve the facilities we have, rather than use the grandiose plans that people have put up over the years, of which we have a cupboard full that never got up. It is something that one day will happen, I suppose, but it would require a significant amount of money. We spent \$1 million, or something like that, fitting out the existing facility. I think the facility is quite good and it would cost a lot more than that to do now. The buildings are currently leased for at least the next three years, and I am hoping, probably economically, that it will continue.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: Mr Speaker, with regard to the various capital estimates contained within the budget, I note that members of Parliament are still sharing offices. I guess this question goes somewhat to the previous question, but I have to say that I find it a particularly untenable situation in which members of Parliament, dealing with highly confidential matters, are being overheard by other members of Parliament in that same office. I know that at one stage there were up to three members of Parliament sharing an office. What plans do you as the Speaker have to address that situation?

The SPEAKER: The plan when I first became Speaker was to ensure that no member of Parliament had more than one member sharing an office. That was the aim. That is now in fact what we have achieved, unless members share for other reasons. However, each member of Parliament has an allocation of half an office. It is just not physically possible within the walls of this building to give each member a single office. Many members, of course, who hold an office just above a member of Parliament are allocated a single office for that position. I think there are probably 18 such positions in the Assembly. I can give the member a copy of the allocation. There are currently about 18 single offices. To provide that for each member would require an additional building, which would cost \$50 million to \$60 million. At the current rate, we would require another 51 offices to achieve single-member offices.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: Further, Mr Speaker, you have no move afoot to even undertake a feasibility study for the new building; would I be correct in assuming that?

[9.10 am]

The SPEAKER: We are undertaking feasibility studies. I am just saying that in my estimation the funding of a building of that nature is a long way off.

Mr P.W. ANDREWS: In a similar vein to the member for Kalgoorlie and the member for Serpentine-Jarrahdale, I have a question relating to the third dot point on page 56 about accommodation. Firstly, could the Speaker outline the difficulty in receiving overseas delegations without having a designated area within the parliamentary precinct? In conceptualising what should happen, has the Speaker given any thought to a reception hall?

The SPEAKER: The closest thing we have to a reception hall is the Aboriginal People's Room, which is slowly improving in quality. The positioning of the large table in that room enhanced its capacity considerably. We have problems hosting meetings, dinners and the like when we have large delegations. We often use external facilities to host dinners and the like. There is a feasibility plan to build another building. That will happen one day. We are nowhere near doing that in this budget. Maybe the next Speaker may be more successful in getting the \$50 million or \$60 million required to build that building.

Chairman; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Paul Andrews; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Day; Mr John Hyde; Mr Tony Simpson

Mr P.W. ANDREWS: It would seem most difficult to welcome overseas delegations from China, as an example, and then take them off site. It seems to be penny-wise and pound-foolish.

The SPEAKER: That is right. It is often quite pleasant to take them to other places. Some of the restaurants around Perth are particularly attractive to take people and it adds to the visit. It is the dream to have the in-house facilities capable of dealing with large delegations. I hope that over the next 10 years the number of delegations from China and Japan increase, and that travel by members of Parliament from here to those countries, our important trading partners, increases as well.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I cannot find a specific reference to the subject of my next question so I refer to page 59 and the dot point relating to the resumption of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association responsibilities in the Assembly. I refer to interparliamentary and intergovernmental delegations. Contrary to what the Speaker may infer from the question, I actually support travel by members of Parliament. What further delegations from this Parliament, particularly from the Assembly, are contemplated for the remainder of this calendar year?

The SPEAKER: We are going to Japan at the end of this month to further the sister state relationship. Depending on who the Speaker is, I hope there will be a visit to China next year to develop the sister state relationship there. We have an incoming delegation from Zhejiang in mid-June of this financial year, so it will not be in this budget. We are taking the secretariat of the CPA back into the Assembly this year. I think it is in a different state from when we gave it to the Legislative Council. Financially, it is far worse off than when it went to the Council. It will be my job and the job of the next Speaker to restore that position over the next four years for which the Assembly has control of it.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Further to that comment, I would appreciate some explanation as to how the financial state of the CPA can vary.

The SPEAKER: It depends on how the submissions are put to Treasury for funding of that operation. There appears to be quite a marked downturn in the financial viability of our branch and therefore the capacity to send members on delegations, which are particularly useful for the education of members. The member can rest assured that I will endeavour to rectify that in the little time I have left.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I refer to the second dot point under “Major Initiatives For 2008-009” on page 59, which states —

Continue refining plans for the induction of new members . . .

Is it intended to incorporate into that induction process some specific guidelines for the behaviour of members towards other members generally outside the chamber, particularly to parliamentary staff? Is it intended to include what is appropriate and inappropriate and also a mediation process so that, in the event that an issue arises, it is not dealt with in the media? Other workplaces have very specific guidelines and processes so that if an employee believes he or she has been subjected to some form of harassment or unfair treatment, the person has a process to go through rather than having to seek a lawyer or go to the media to get a resolution of the issue.

The SPEAKER: Members are not employees, so they are not subject to some of the restrictions that do apply. I believe that the Attorney General’s bill will address some of those issues. There is no plan to train members of Parliament in how to treat people on a one-to-one basis.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I was more interested in the relationship between members and staff.

The SPEAKER: As part of the second dot point there are plans for ethical training for the next incoming group of members of Parliament. Some current members may wish to go to that. There is no plan to have a sit-down meeting where someone says, “This is how you should treat staff.”

Mr P. PAPALIA: The second part of my question related to a defined process. In my experience, when mediation is introduced at a very early stage, it is a very valuable tool as it prevents escalation of a conflict or dissatisfaction rather than just leaving it undefined and subject to any manner of different options.

The SPEAKER: Most of the complaints within this building relate to staff issues. That is clearly defined. There is a clear process that seems to work remarkably well, and disputes are resolved. I understand that there are a couple a year. Despite what sometimes appears in the press, disputes between members of Parliament and staff do not appear to be a major problem when they occur. When they get in the press, they become noteworthy. I can remember only two in 17 years of being a member of Parliament. I do not think it is a significant problem.

The CHAIRMAN: If members wish to explore a certain line of questioning, they should ask for a further question and the Chair will allow that within reason. If members require specific information, it is supplementary information.

[9.20 am]

Chairman; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Paul Andrews; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Day; Mr John Hyde; Mr Tony Simpson

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I refer to page 59. The third dot point under “Major Initiatives For 2008-09” refers to the planning and implementation of broadcasting facilities for public hearings of Legislative Assembly committees. I think that is a good idea, of course, and I am very supportive of that. However, that raises the wider issue of the public dissemination of the proceedings of Parliament, in particular live broadcasting. I am aware that the proceedings of this state Parliament are available to the public live over the internet. The proceedings of federal Parliament are broadcast by the ABC. It is not the highest rating program, of course, but from time to time major issues arise that people are interested in. It would seem to me desirable that this Parliament think about establishing some form of wider broadcasting facility. From time to time, issues arise in this Parliament that are of great interest to the people of this state. A broadcast of the proceedings of Parliament would assist in maintaining the relevance of this Parliament to the people of the state. Hopefully it would also assist in ensuring that there is a reasonable standard of debate. There are a couple of ways in which that could be achieved. One would be by making the proceedings of Parliament available to community-based radio stations, of which there are many throughout the state, if any station did want to broadcast the proceedings live. The other is for Parliament itself to obtain a licence to run a community-type radio station so that the proceedings can be broadcast live, particularly when an issue arises that people may be interested in. Mr Speaker, have you thought about that, or would you be prepared to think about that?

The SPEAKER: I had not thought about starting up my own radio station! That is the first I have heard of that suggestion!

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I assure you, Mr Speaker, that it would be purely for broadcasting the proceedings of the Parliament. It would not be for a disco session!

The SPEAKER: That is an interesting suggestion. It is true that we are expanding the television coverage, particularly of our committee systems, to make the proceedings of the Parliament more accessible to the public. Any television station can now take the footage at no cost. We cannot force a television station to take the footage, unfortunately, but it is available. We also provide our footage to Access 31. Access 31 was having some problems with the feed, so we now provide Access 31 with a tape each day of question time. If any other television channel wished to publicise or better cover the proceedings of Parliament, we would give that station every encouragement, because that is what the system was set up for. I think the system is under-utilised. I think people would be interested in question time. However, how we can get the mainstream television stations to take that up, even though it is available to them free, I do not know. Every endeavour has been made to make it attractive for them. If any other radio station also wanted access to the footage, we would make sure that it could get access to that footage.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Other community radio stations may also be interested in that footage, so perhaps it should be publicised more widely that that facility is available.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I refer to page 59. The dot point under “Major Initiatives For 2008-09” refers to further education on the role of the Parliament. I want to refer in particular to the website of Parliament. I raised this issue with the Clerk earlier this year. It seems that there have been some difficulties in updating the website. I am particularly concerned that the late Trevor Sprigg was shown as the member for Murdoch for two months after he had passed away. I understand that has now been rectified. However, there are some more systematic problems with the website. Has those problems now been corrected?

The SPEAKER: Apparently there were some problems with the website. I apologise to the Sprigg family that it took so long to change that member’s entry on the website. I did not know about that. A number of people have now been given access to the Parliament website to change the information on that website. I understand that will improve the speed at which information can be changed and will ensure the website is updated regularly. As I have said, I did not know about that. However, I do know that if someone has passed away, that person’s name should not continue to appear on the website, because that may cause embarrassment or hurt to the family, and that is unacceptable.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: From my understanding, that was not caused by a lack of intent on the part of the staff of the Parliament to correct that entry. The problem was more deep-seated and was caused by the way the program is structured.

The SPEAKER: Some of the major problems with our computer systems are caused by our lack of capacity to apply the same system to Parliament and to electorate offices. I think our internal structure is as good as we can get it. The problem is caused by the need to combine our information technology system with that of the Premier’s Office. Apparently, there was a problem with the capacity of our people to deal with the software that is on our system. However, that has now been rectified.

Chairman; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Paul Andrews; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Day; Mr John Hyde; Mr Tony Simpson

The CHAIRMAN: Just as a point of clarification, Mr Speaker, it has not been rectified. It is an ongoing issue with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, even as late as this morning.

The SPEAKER: No. I am talking about our system—our website.

The CHAIRMAN: The Parliament system is fine. However, the one down the road is not very special.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Further to the question asked by the member for Cottesloe about the Parliament webpage, is that hosted within our IT section, or is it outsourced?

The SPEAKER: It is in-house.

Mr P.W. ANDREWS: Mr Speaker, you have just alluded to the fact that some of the IT services are provided by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, and others are provided by the Parliament. It would seem that has caused some difficulties in particular areas. Has any work been done on smoothing out those processes between the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and Parliament and perhaps bringing them all under the control of the Parliament?

The SPEAKER: We have written, yet again, to the Premier, and we have not yet received a response. The response will probably be the same as in the last 10 letters that we have sent. Members of Parliament did endure quite significant difficulties when the programs were altered recently. We have a brilliant solution to that—we will give everyone a new computer! Those new computers will come online at the end of June, beginning of July. Hopefully, that will solve the problem—or it will until the Premier's office changes the system again, but it will not be this Speaker who will need to deal with that!

Mr P.W. ANDREWS: So long as when they change our email address, they let us know this time!

The SPEAKER: I did not have any problems; my computer is still in the cupboard!

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: I refer to page 58. The second dot point under “Major Achievements For 2008-09” refers to increased training and development of staff to service the house and its committees. I understand there is some concern within the committee system collectively that there are not enough resources and staff to service the committee system. Is the Speaker aware of this concern, and are there any plans to rectify this situation?

[9.30 am]

The SPEAKER: We are aware that at times committees lack resources. There are currently more resources in our committee system than was the case previously. Under the former committee system, there was only one standing committee—the Public Accounts Committee—and although that committee was fully staffed, the number of staff for other committees was minimal. Under the current system, staff have been designated to portfolio areas. It is true that at times committees are either given directions to hold hearings directly from the house or matters are referred to it in other ways, which results in some committees not having enough staff. Each of the requests for additional staff is considered and most of the time they are approved and external resources are given to those committees to cater for the peaks in their workload. The committee system works reasonably well. There is no capacity to have an open-ended staffing facility for the committee system. The best way to increase that capacity is through the management of the committees. All the committees have a principal research officer and most have an assistant. This budget includes funding for two additional research officers, which will give the Legislative Assembly a greater research capacity.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: Where will the two additional research officers be located?

The SPEAKER: One is earmarked for the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: That is a very wise decision.

The SPEAKER: The other is a floating resource but will probably go to the Public Accounts Committee initially.

Mr J.N. HYDE: The first dot point on page 59 of the *Budget Statements* under “Major Initiatives For 2008-09” is a reference to the Bunbury regional Parliament. What is the budget for the regional Parliament?

The SPEAKER: We have budgeted \$150 000 for the regional sitting and we will probably not exceed that estimation. That amount allows for people's claims for accommodation and the like. Although we know how much it will cost to rent the marquees, buildings and chairs and the cost of the functions and the like, we do not know how many nights people will claim for accommodation.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Are the marquees for a circus?

Chairman; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Paul Andrews; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Day; Mr John Hyde; Mr Tony Simpson

The SPEAKER: No, they are for education. Believe it or not, Bunbury does not have the sorts of facilities that are similar to those in Geraldton. Therefore, the educational component of the regional Parliament will be attached to the facility in the parking area. The tent will be about the same size as this chamber.

Mr J.N. HYDE: How much did the Geraldton regional Parliament cost?

The SPEAKER: It cost just under \$120 000.

Mr J.N. HYDE: That seems remarkably cheap.

The SPEAKER: It is cheap compared with the Queensland regional Parliament, but we do not intend to do what Queensland does.

Mr J.N. HYDE: We could if we abolished the upper house!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Can the Speaker give an assurance that the Bunbury regional Parliament will proceed on the time and date specified?

The SPEAKER: We are proceeding as though that date is locked in stone.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I refer to the significant issues and trends on page 56 of the *Budget Statements* regarding the continuing pressure on parliamentary committees. I sit on two parliamentary committees. One is a joint committee and the other is a Legislative Assembly committee. It might just be my imagination, but it seems that the joint committee has unlimited funds to a certain degree, whereas when the Legislative Assembly committee wants to employ a lawyer for advice, members must go cap in hand to the Speaker. For the committee system to work, it is a bit of an obstacle to have to ask the Speaker for more funds to pay for legal advice and so forth. The committee does not have free rein to conduct its inquiry. Are there any plans to change that system?

The SPEAKER: Not while I am the Speaker. It is appropriate for the same travel and work restraints to apply to committees that apply to everyone else. The committees used to be given unlimited access to resources but thankfully that no longer happens. I do not know whether committee members come to me cap in hand, but they have extravagant claims at times. If they did not have any constraints on them, the budgets for the committees would be massive.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I refer to the third last dot point on page 56 of the *Budget Statements* relating to pressure on parliamentary committees. I am not sure whether the Speaker is aware of the suggestion made by a government member regarding the need for a joint house committee for the children's commissioner. It was suggested that in the interim, prior to the election, that role could be combined with the Corruption and Crime Commission. That would be entirely inappropriate and I seek some assurance that the Speaker will not support any such action—in other words, the CCC would perform both roles. I seek an assurance that that will not happen.

The SPEAKER: I cannot give an assurance that the house will not do that. If the house resolves to do that, I will provide staff through the committee system to achieve what the house has resolved. I do not know whether that will happen. It is a matter for both houses. Both houses may resolve to set up another committee.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: That will be fine.

The SPEAKER: I have not had any discussions about that. If it is going to happen, it will have to happen pretty quickly.

Mr J.N. HYDE: I refer to the undertaking of significant upgrades of information systems under "Major Achievements For 2007-08" on page 56 of the *Budget Statements*. How much money has been spent on information technology and what has been the increase over the past financial year? I refer also to the continued high level of satisfaction from users. My network is down again. It seems that every day in the chamber there is a problem with the IT. I appreciate the Speaker's previous comments, but this does seem to have been going on for four or five years.

The SPEAKER: Is that the problems between the two systems?

Mr J.N. HYDE: There is no ongoing IT connectivity or reliable service. It must be wasting the Speaker's time as much as it is wasting ours.

The SPEAKER: The upgrades were as follows: the relocation of the Legislative Council's computers, telecommunications system, sound system and recording services, office equipment and chamber CCTV storage; wireless security and capacity upgrades; data network upgrades; switching and fibre optic upgrades; and memory upgrades for members' laptops.

[9.40 am]

Chairman; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Paul Andrews; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Day; Mr John Hyde; Mr Tony Simpson

Mr J.N. HYDE: Is there a ballpark figure?

The SPEAKER: The ballpark figure is about \$350 000.

Mr J.N. HYDE: I have a further question. Given all these changes—the patching up and the ongoing problems with the Assembly—it may be easier to have computers or laptops based only in Parliament and let the Department of the Premier and Cabinet look after electorate offices, if it wants to. In that way, the system will not be corrupted every time we move our computers from here to a ministerial office, to an electorate office or to somewhere else.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: It never used to be the case. It has occurred only since the last upgrade. It is a disaster.

The CHAIRMAN: We all concur.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Perhaps a reliable resurvey of members should be undertaken.

The SPEAKER: Most of the problems occur when members connect their laptops to their electorate office systems. If they were separate, there would not be a problem.

Mr J.N. HYDE: My laptop works well in my electorate office; it is when I come to Parliament that it does not work properly. It is a compatibility issue.

The SPEAKER: That is right. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet is working on it. Let us hope it gets better.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: I refer to members' laptops and will ask a question based on that in a moment. The upgrade to the new operating system has been an unmitigated disaster and somebody needs to be held accountable for it. I suggest we should have already lost confidence in whoever made the decision to upgrade our laptops without having first determined the suitability of our laptops for an upgrade. Currently, we have 57 members of Parliament operating on substandard laptops who, in the main, are unable to access simple things like their emails. For instance, I have been operating on web mail ever since the so-called laptop upgrade because I simply cannot get my normal system to work. Mr Speaker, are you prepared to apportion blame to somebody with regard to that upgrade? Blame needs to be apportioned. It has been an absolute disgrace. I suggest that the member for North West Coastal, as the Speaker, should have lost confidence in whoever made that decision to upgrade our laptops without first determining their suitability.

Secondly, I note that Mr Speaker said that there is about \$350 000 in the budget for further upgrades to the laptops. I suggest that that money should be made available immediately to prevent members like me, for instance, from having to use web mail, which could more appropriately be named snail mail.

The SPEAKER: I do not disagree with what the member is saying about the problems that the new system has caused members of Parliament. I have not heard anybody say that it has been anything other than a disaster. It was a decision made in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: Who is the individual responsible for that decision?

The SPEAKER: I do not know.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: I am sure that somebody must know who has the authority to determine that members' laptops will be upgraded.

The SPEAKER: I do not know who it was. I presume it would be someone under the control of the director general of the Premier's office, who is Mal Wauchope.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: Can I put that question on notice.

The SPEAKER: The member for Kalgoorlie can put that question to me. It might be a question that the member directs to Mal Wauchope in the estimates committee when the Department of the Premier and Cabinet's budget is determined.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: Is it not a question that you, Mr Speaker, can answer under the standing orders applicable to this session?

The SPEAKER: It is not a subject that is within my area of knowledge.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Kalgoorlie could ask that question on Wednesday morning when division 3, "Premier and Cabinet", is before the committee.

The SPEAKER: If the member puts the question on notice, I will direct it to the Premier's department.

The \$350 000 is not in relation to the laptops. The program of replacing the laptops is another program, which will cost about \$170 000.

Chairman; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Paul Andrews; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr John Day; Mr John Hyde; Mr Tony Simpson

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: When will that budget kick in?

The SPEAKER: This year.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: It needs to happen next week.

The SPEAKER: My understanding is that by the end of June members will have their new laptops. I can give the member the exact dates by way of supplementary information.

Mr M.J. BIRNEY: For the record, I am about to buy a computer out of my own money because I am sick of using this rubbishy machine.

The SPEAKER: I just bought one.

The CHAIRMAN: Mr Speaker, have you agreed to provide the date for the provision of new laptops to members of the Assembly.

The SPEAKER: That is correct.

[Supplementary Information No A1.]

The SPEAKER: I do not wish to rush members, but we have the Ombudsman and his staff present.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Following on from the question about laptops, but not on the issue just debated, it has been a longstanding concern of members on both sides that matters such as IT, imprest, electorate offices and electorate staff are managed through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. That seems to be, in principle, wrong. I think all members would prefer to see those issues handled through the Parliament so that all members are seen as equal and treated equally and objectively and separate from the executive arm of government. Has the Parliament investigated the cost of the staffing requirement of shifting those responsibilities to Parliament; and, if not, would it consider doing so?

The SPEAKER: It is not a staffing decision. One would presume that if Parliament were to do the things that the Premier's department now does, it would come with a budget allocation to cover the cost. It is a transfer of costs rather than an increase in costs. I am of the view that Parliament would do it better because Parliament better understands the requirements of members of Parliament. As Speaker I had a problem getting an electorate office in Carnarvon. It took the best part of two years to get an electorate office there. An office is not difficult to find. I found a place within a week, but it took two years to get to that stage. I doubt whether any department would move slower than that.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I guess my question is about Parliamentary Services. If it has not done that investigation, I hope work will be done on the practicality of doing so and what issues might arise so that the Parliament would know where it stood.

The SPEAKER: It would not take a huge amount of time or effort for us to take over those roles. There has been some initial planning. Until a decision is made in the positive, we cannot move forward. I would not have thought it would restrict the capacity of the Assembly, for instance, to do other things because we are doing those things. It would only really come over on the basis of the cost transfer from the Premier's office.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I imagine it would come under Parliamentary Services rather than the Assembly. Parliamentary Services could take on that role for most of it.

The SPEAKER: For a lot of it.

The appropriation was recommended.

[9.50 am]