

**Division 3: Department of the Premier and Cabinet — Service 5, Innovation and the Digital Economy —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms J.L. Hanns, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Innovation and the Digital Economy.

Ms E. Roper, Director General.

Mr G. Italiano, Government Chief Information Officer.

Mr C. Patterson, Director, Corporate Services.

Ms N. Kacperek, Chief Data Officer.

Mr P. Bouhlas, Chief Information Security Officer

Mr A. Degli Esposti, Chief Technology Officer.

Mr J. Petersen, Chief Digital Officer.

Ms I. Deng, Senior Policy Adviser.

[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 Leader of the Liberal Party.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to digital transformation on page 60 of the *Budget statements*, and paragraph 2 about the ServiceWA app. Given that the app is readily used to claim government payments and assistance, how many users in WA are currently registered on the app as at today, 22 May?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Obviously the ServiceWA app has been incredibly successful. The most up-to-date information I have is that as at 19 May there are 1 600 779 users, with a total of 1 613 132 downloads of the ServiceWA app in Western Australia.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What future features are expected to be rolled onto the app?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** The member may already be aware that the ServiceWA app already includes the Emergency WA functionality, weather station information, online licence search, offers—the WA student assistance payment appeared in the ServiceWA app—FuelWatch, SharkSmart and, my favourite, the unclaimed money function, because I found some money that I was owed. I suggest that everyone check that! It is a highly successful platform. It obviously commenced with the COVID check-in system and supported that process. I have mentioned how many downloads there have been as at 19 May. The approved expenditure for the department in this budget is \$9.9 million. The department has been allocated \$7.7 million over four years to develop the functionality and storage capacity of ServiceWA, with a further \$2.2 million in capital expenditure provided over the same period to deliver the project. I guess the key part of this funding is that it includes the delivery of an International Organization for Standardization-compliant digital wallet. The development of the wallet will provide a secure foundational capability for the app to hold myriad different government-issued credentials. Some of those credentials could be trades permits, white cards, working with children checks, digital proof of age cards or digital Seniors Cards. The ServiceWA whole-of-government platform is provided by the Office of Digital Government, and individual agencies will potentially be able to build functionality within that platform. For example, the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety would be the agency responsible for electrical licences and the Department of Communities would have working with children checks.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Is WA looking at introducing a digital driver's licence similar to other states?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** As I said, the ServiceWA app will provide the functionality for a number of government agencies. The decisions about what might be included would be up to the individual agencies.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to government policy management of the digital economy on page 66 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. During the Treasury briefing I was fascinated to hear that Treasury, because it has no faith in its fellow

agencies, is setting up its own IT oversight group that will oversee all of the software purchases, development or whatever in other departments. The reason I was intrigued by that was I knew this session was coming up, and I would have thought that this is the government policy management for the digital economy, and it is providing strategic advice and the like. I would have thought that that was the function under this part of government. I am wondering: is the Treasury unit a duplication or a turf war? What is the difference between the two units? Treasury is putting some significant resources into it, and it appears to me to be an unnecessary duplication of services. I am not asking the parliamentary secretary to comment on whether she thinks it is necessary or unnecessary; rather, what is the difference between this function and what the parliamentary secretary understands is the new Treasury function?

[9.10 pm]

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I will refer that to the director general.

**Ms E. Roper:** I will not be baited to have a dig at my central agency colleagues, but it is true that both the Department of Treasury and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet have a role in assessing submissions to the digital capability fund. Our team is focused more on the technology aspects; Treasury is more focused on the financial aspects of the proposals, so there are legitimately two roles to be played in that, and we work very collaboratively in that exercise with Treasury. I will get Mr Greg Italiano to further expand on that.

**Mr G. Italiano:** Yes, I can expand on the director general's response. There are two broad categories of work that we undertake with the Department of Treasury, with the first being the assessment of submissions that we receive for funding under the digital capability fund. As members can well imagine, there are various aspects to assessing those submissions. It is the case that Treasury has the relevant skills and knowledge to apply to the assessment of those. I think the process would not work as well if it were not the case that Treasury were involved in the assessment of those proposals, so that is one aspect of it. The second is that given we now have a very significant number of projects that have been funded by the digital capability fund since its inception, we have a range of assurance activities we undertake with the sector to monitor and undertake work to look at the health of projects if there is an indication that some of those projects are not proceeding as well as they might. Treasury also plays a role in the assurance framework that we have in place for those projects and, again, it is very useful when government receives advice on these matters. The advice covers both our perspective and Treasury's perspective on these matters, and that, I think, is an efficient and effective way of dealing with the question. In my view, it is not a turf war, member, but rather an effective collaboration in which the skills of both agencies are brought to bear.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Although Treasury might be able to assist with actuarial skills, I would have thought that when it comes to the desirability or otherwise of departments heading down a certain path, this department would be the computing experts in that and in all the aspects that relate to that. The resources that are going to Treasury are substantial, including computing expertise. I am wondering why we need that. I understand the actuarial aspect of it, but Treasury already does that. Quite why we would need to duplicate computing expertise in Treasury bemuses me. Does the parliamentary secretary have any comment on why we would need to duplicate computing expertise across the two departments?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** At the risk of repeating ourselves, I am very happy to defer to the director general.

**Ms E. Roper:** I probably do not have anything more to add, but I will give Greg Italiano a shot.

**Mr G. Italiano:** That is very kind, director general! I would say a couple of things about this. Firstly, it is certainly not the case that Treasury is exercising—to use the words of the member—computing knowledge. We certainly have the technical expertise when it comes to information architecture and programs and the like. It is increasingly the case that we think of ICT projects as still being about the technology—that is rarely the case, although the technology is important. Technology now is a broad enabler of change. It is a way in which agencies are responding to demand challenges, the need for data and the need for better services. Secondly, I want to make a point about disconnecting business acumen, technology and service delivery. All these things now come together in the way that we deploy solutions, so it is very, very important that these projects are assessed from a holistic point of view, and Treasury certainly has skills and capabilities to add that bit. I certainly do not expect, nor do I receive, advice on technology from my Treasury colleagues.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Not yet! Thank you, parliamentary secretary.

I refer to page 60. Under the significant issues impacting the agency, paragraph 3 refers to cybersecurity. The comment there is around the 24/7 coverage. Can the parliamentary secretary inform us of the number of cybersecurity attacks on government systems? Are we seeing an increase in the number of those attacks or is it a steady stream?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** It would be fair to say, member, that Western Australian organisations and, in fact, Australian organisations, both public and private, as well as Australian citizens, are facing unprecedented cybersecurity threats through scams, hacks and the like. Protecting government services is particularly important. Protecting systems and information from cyberthreats and misuse is a priority of the government. It is a key pillar of the *Digital strategy for the Western Australian government 2021–2025*. The department, through the Office of Digital Government,

works in partnership with the WA public sector to improve cybersecurity resilience. I have to commend it on the work that has been done in this respect. As to the actual numbers of threats, I will refer to the director general.

**Ms E. Roper:** I will ask Greg Italiano to respond with the details.

[9.20 pm]

**Mr G. Italiano:** Just to provide further context, we do not use the term “attack”; we use the term “cyber incident”. The definition of an incident is one that requires some action to be taken by an agency and/or our security operations centre. We have had a mature security operations centre model in place now for about two years, so the numbers before that are probably not worth quoting because I think they would mislead in terms of their veracity. I would also like to add that we can see other influences on a number of incidents that we see. For example, last financial year we had 68 entities connected to our operations centre; we now have 88, so there are more connected entities. It is also the case that the way an operations centre works, incidents are detected by logs or pieces of data that the operations centre receives. Over time, we can fine-tune the data we receive so that we are receiving less information that we might have acted on in the past, but now do not have to because we have refined our automation rules.

To get to the incidents, looking at last financial year, from June 2022 to July 2023, our security operations centre recorded 12 332 incidents. From 27 June 2023 until 19 April 2024—just a couple of days ago—thus far we have received 8 621, so the numbers are coming in at a roughly similar level, but as I say, there can be reasons why those incidents are moving. Those are the numbers, to answer the question.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Are there any particular parts of government that are more subject to cyber incidents than others, or does it range broadly across the various government agencies?

**Mr G. Italiano:** We tend to think about it in the context of risk profile, and one of my favourite cyber terms is the “attack surface”, which is the number of applications and how large an agency network is, but also how attractive their data is in terms of whether it is valuable, so obviously we are talking about personally identifiable information, credentials and the like. We have identified nine government entities that we provide particular attention to in terms of their security planning and the work we do with them to lift their cyber maturity. Having declared those nine, I think I could probably remember most of them, but suffice it to say that they are the large agencies that you would expect—the Department of Health, the Western Australia Police Force, the Department of Training and Workforce Development, the Department of Justice, the Department of Transport, Landgate and the like. Those are agencies that operate significant systems. We really worry about two things: one is interfering with the operations of government that would impact on critical services, and we also worry about the exfiltration of sensitive data and the compromising of that. Under our thinking, there are larger high-risk agencies, and that is where we apply our attention, in the main. But, I hasten to add, all agencies are potential targets and no part of government is immune from the threat of a cyber incident.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Do mobile phones present an increased threat to our network, or is that just part of the ongoing threat to the network that we had before? For example, my mobile phone is connected to the DPC mail service and whatever.

**The CHAIR:** Member, that is not really a budget-related question, but the parliamentary secretary can respond as she sees fit.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I checked with Mr Italiano and he is happy to respond to that question.

**Mr G. Italiano:** Any device that is connected to a network, mobile or otherwise, is a device that we need to have regard to in terms of security. Mobile devices are secured by various mobile device management rules and need their software to be updated and passwords to be protected, just like any other device. One of the things we talk about in cybersecurity is: you are only as strong as your weakest point, so if it is a mobile device or a third party provider or software as a service, wherever that weakness is, that is what we are concerned about.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Just further to that, is there currently a ban on TikTok for government employees, members of government or ministers? What is the current policy?

**The CHAIR:** Same again, parliamentary secretary?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Again, it does not relate to a particular line item in the budget, but I am very happy if Mr Italiano would like to explain that to the member.

**The CHAIR:** Mr TikTok star!

**Mr G. Italiano:** Thank you, chair! In fact, this matter was raised in last year’s estimates because not long before estimates last year, we had issued an alert to agencies that they should not permit TikTok to be installed on government devices unless in the case of an exemption. Exemptions have been applied for a very few; the chief information security officer vets those requests. There are agencies that legitimately use TikTok for information purposes to provide information to the community and the like and we have ways where we see the need to do that to secure and separate those devices in a way that we mitigate the threat from a security perspective, but the standing

position is that TikTok is banned, and that followed a position taken by the commonwealth government prior to us going down that path.

**The appropriation was recommended.**