

# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

**2018–19 ANNUAL REPORTS**



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
TUESDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2019**

**SESSION THREE  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES**

**Members**  
**Hon Alanna Clohesy (Chair)**  
**Hon Tjorn Sibma (Deputy Chair)**  
**Hon Diane Evers**  
**Hon Aaron Stonehouse**  
**Hon Colin Tincknell**

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**Hearing commenced at 12.32 pm**

**Hon SUE ELLERY**

**Minister representing the Minister for Community Services, examined:**

**Mrs MICHELLE ANDREWS**

**Director General, examined:**

**Ms JACKIE TANG**

**Assistant Director General, Service Delivery, Metropolitan Communities, examined:**

**Ms HELEN NYS**

**Assistant Director General, Policy and Service Design, examined:**

**Mr LIAM CARRAN**

**Executive Director, Finance and Business Services, examined:**

**The CHAIR:** On behalf of the Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I welcome you to today's hearing. Today's hearing will be broadcast. Before we go live, I would like to remind all parties that if you have any private documents with you, including iPads, to keep them flat on the desk to avoid the camera. Please begin the broadcast.

Can the witnesses confirm that they have read, understood and signed a document titled "Information for Witnesses"?

**The WITNESSES:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. It is essential that all your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. It is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question. Agencies have an important role and duty in assisting the Parliament to review agency outcomes and the committee values your assistance with this.

Minister, do you have a brief opening statement?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** No.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Minister, if I can get you to turn to page 32 of the annual report, you will see the section entitled "Working with Children Check". In particular, the graphic on page 32 indicates that there were 202 negative notices issued during the reporting period. You probably do not have this document at your disposal, but the Auditor General recently tabled the report "Working with Children Checks—Follow-up" on 23 October 2019, and page 13 says that 128 negative notices were issued by the department in the 2018–19 period. How do we explain the difference between the department's figure of 202 and the Auditor General's 128?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I do not have the Auditor General's report in front of me but I am familiar with the report. I will see whether anyone can explain what the difference is. Maybe I will start and somebody can then explain how the Auditor General reached that figure and we reported a different figure.

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I will give the committee an example of why, because the honourable member has asked questions before about why there have been different numbers between different agencies.

I will give you the example I personally had last Friday when a member of my family was applying for a job and needed to apply for a working with children check. This member of my family, who came to my office to get me to help them fill in the form, was applying for several positions. One of them was with a labour hire company that provided services to private schools; they were facilities management services and hospitality services. For that particular labour hire company, he needed to fill in a working with children check, which I helped him to do. It turns out he was applying for several labour hire companies. Another one did not provide services that needed a working with children check; he got the interview and he is there now. However, in order to fill in that form, he needed to get the name of somebody from the labour hire firm that he was applying to. He put in his application, but if it turns out that he gets the job today, that application is still going ahead. I hasten to add that this person has no reason to suspect he would ever get a negative notice, interim or otherwise. Let us say that he did—that information would not go to the company because he would never end up actually applying for that job because he got the one he had the interview for today.

I know the honourable member has in the past expressed some concern about differences in those numbers between, say, the Department of Education or the Department of Health and the Department of Communities. The Department of Communities oversees the regulatory role and not just the provision of services, so it has the number of applications for which either an interim or a final—if that is what it is called—negative notice was found. But the employing agency does not necessarily have the same number, because if you use the example of last Friday, the person never actually got the job and so that matter did not proceed. I do not know whether that helps us to explain what the Auditor General was counting, but I will ask the director general to make some comments.

**Mrs ANDREWS:** Certainly. Just to confirm more broadly that there will be differences in information provided by different entities because they are counting different things. It is because of the construct of the legislation and the regulations; it is not a matter of noncompliance. We are working to improve the clarity and transparency of the information and the alignment. As the minister explained, the way the process is set up at the moment, we can get differences when the form is filled out simply by someone referring to WACHS in the Kimberley versus the Department of Health. The entities will count things differently. Secondly —

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Can I just say, Chair, with all due respect to the witnesses, none of that has anything to do with negative notices. Can I ask the witnesses to confirm whether any department other than the Department of Communities issues negative notices in Western Australia?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Madam Chair, I think it would be helpful if the questioner does not interrupt the person who is trying to provide an answer, which is what the director general was trying to do. What we have both been trying to identify to you is that the Department of Communities has two roles. It is an employer of people who do child-related work but it is also in charge of the regulatory system around the working with children check.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Does anybody else issue a negative notice?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am happy to provide you the answer that I think will help you, but just let me finish and perhaps let the director general finish when she is trying to provide you an answer as well. There will be a difference, and that difference does not necessarily of itself reflect either a failure in the system or a miscounting or anything else, because the nature of the system is that at various points different organisations are counting different things.

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[12.40 pm]

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Not for negative notices.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** The original question was around why is there a difference in the number between the Auditor General's report for the same reporting period. If we do not have an answer to that question here, then I will take notice.

**Mrs ANDREWS:** We do not have an answer to that question.

*[Supplementary Information No C1.]*

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Back to the question. Does anybody other than the Department of Communities issue negative notices in Western Australia?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Do you mean under the working with children check? I am not sure that I understand the question. The working with children check goes through one regulatory system.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Which is the Department of Communities, right?

**Mrs ANDREWS:** Can I expand on something, minister, in relation to that?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Sure.

**Mrs ANDREWS:** The Department of Communities issues those notices, but to be clear, it can appear to you that there is a misalignment simply because we have issued a negative notice for someone who intended to be employed by an organisation, but they never were employed by that organisation, so the organisation, the employer, is not aware.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** But with respect to the witness, your annual report says 202 negative notices were issued and the Auditor General from Western Australia—nothing to do with any organisation—they say that the amount is 128. They both cannot be correct.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We have already taken that on notice.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** I note that the Auditor General's report to which I have referred indicated that 160 registered foster carers did not have a working with children check or an application process as at June 2019, which is of course in the reporting period. Even more concerning, 46 of those already had a child placed in their care and, notably, 21 of those who already had a child in their care had never lodged an application at all. In light of this, can you just indicate at what point in the department's screening of foster carers is a working with children check required?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I will get the director general to make some comments about the process, and I will just note, I guess, for the record that we are happy to answer questions about the annual report. I do not have the Auditor General's report in front of me, so I will take at face value what you have just said, but we are not here to answer questions about the Auditor General's report; it is about the annual report. I will ask the director general to walk you through the process.

**The CHAIR:** Before the director general does that, I would like remind members that the questions are within the scope of the annual report, so if your questions could be based in the page number of the annual report. There is a broad opportunity for you to relate to other material, but at the end of the day, the question really needs to relate to the annual report.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Page 32.

**Mrs ANDREWS:** Member, the best interests of children are always going to be at the centre of all of the decisions we make—decisions that we make in regard to the working with children regulatory framework, decisions we make in terms of screening and appointment of foster carers and decisions we make in relation to the ongoing engagement of foster carers. Stepping back from that, as has

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been highlighted in our own communications, in our annual report and in the Auditor General's report, there are significant opportunities for us to improve the compliance audits and processes that we are using across the Department of Communities, and we have stepped out a very robust and accelerated implementation plan to identify those foster carers where their working with children card may have expired and those foster carers who are yet to obtain their working with children card. We are implementing a program that will see us being in a much higher level of compliance next year.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** At the moment, is it the case that some foster carers do not have a card?

**Mrs ANDREWS:** There are a small number of foster carers who are not holding a card at the moment, and we are actively managing those, making decisions that are in the best interests of the child.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** When you say a small number, how many?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Do we have that number available?

**Mrs ANDREWS:** Not with confidence. Jackie, do you?

**Ms TANG:** Not to hand with confidence, but it is relatively few. If I may just continue, some have had their card and it has expired, and it is a matter of us working with them because they need to put the form in. Some foster carers are quite remote. That is not an excuse, but it is an explanation of the logistics of it. Some of the currency is not because they have never had one, it is because of the delay in getting renewal for one.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** But for clarity, is it the case that some have never had a card? I understand that some have had an expired card.

**Ms TANG:** I am not aware. Today, if a child was placed in the last week, I could not say that has not happened.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** The Auditor General says that 21 of them who already had a child in care had never lodged an application at all. Things might have changed; you might have identified those 21 people and ensured that they have an application.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Chair, if we do not have the detail here, we will undertake to provide it.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, you have already undertaken to provide it on notice.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Can I also make this point as well, which may or may not have anything to do with people referred to in the Auditor General's report: quite often the circumstances in which children come into care are circumstances of an emergency trauma, and it can be 24 hours a day. It would not be unusual, for example, for a child protection worker in very difficult circumstances in an emergency situation to make a judgement call that a family member is best placed to take the children until further decisions can be made, and that that family member may never have had a working with children check. That does not mean that they are exempt from having to have a working with children check if they are going to ultimately be a foster carer, but I just point out that sometimes the circumstances in which children come into care might mean in the very short term that they are placed with someone who may not yet have a working with children check for reasons that are in the best interests of the child.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** That is not unreasonable. Can I ask you—I suspect you will have to take it on notice—to identify the longest period of time that a foster carer has had a child in care and has never lodged an application?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I will take it on notice. I am not sure how far back we will be able to check.

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**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** I am saying current foster carers, so there will be a proportion of foster carers. I think the number will be around 21 according to the Auditor General. Of those 21, or whatever the number is—I do not need to know the name of the person, but how long is that period for whoever is the one who has had the longest period of time without one?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** If we are able to, will provide that to you.

*[Supplementary Information No C2.]*

**The CHAIR:** That will be the circumstances around that as of today's date.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Is there a readily run data report that would inform the minister at a glance how many registered foster carers require a working with children check, have an application in process and whether they have one child or more placed in their care?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am not sure whether there is tracking, but I will check for you.

**Mrs ANDREWS:** There is a readily run report.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Good, there will be questions coming!

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I refer to page 23 and the final dot point that talks about the Communicare Breathing Space. Has the second Breathing Space now been opened?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I will ask Helen Nys to answer that.

**Ms NYS:** Yes, it has.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** How many men undertook Breathing Space programs during the period of the annual report?

**Ms NYS:** I am afraid I do not have that detail.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Can I please have that on notice?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** As part of that question on notice, can I please ask how many men successfully completed the program? I would also like to know, of those who have completed the program, how many have gone on to reoffend? I assume that is being tracked.

[12.50 pm]

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We are just going to have a look.

**The CHAIR:** So that data is not available today?

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** It is apparently.

**Mr CARREN:** Yes, it is.

**The CHAIR:** Being led by the minister not anyone else.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** That does not go to the question that has been asked. If we are able to, we will take it on notice. I am not sure to what extent this is the agency that records the reoffending or if this agency would know that.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Because you know what I am effectively trying to ask is the efficacy of the program itself. I would like to get any data that is available on notice as to how the efficacy is being measured; and, if it is not able to be measured by the department for child protection, who is doing that, please?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Sure. I think we can give you information that we might have about how the programs are reviewed and evaluated and what data is collected. That may or may not include

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whether or not the person has reoffended. If I give you the example, they re-offend, but they do not come anywhere near the Communicare Breathing Space program again; that program and the people who collect the data around that program might not know that the person has reoffended if they never come back to Breathing Space.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** What I am trying to understand, though, is how then we are able to measure effectively the recidivism rates around these funded programs.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Happy to take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** If the department does not have that data themselves, they may have a relationship with any other department that might. So, the member is after the effectiveness of the program.

*[Supplementary Information No C3.]*

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Can I refer to pages 26 and 27, which refers to children in care? For the period of the annual report, what was the average number of placements that a child in care was experiencing during their time in care?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am advised that what is measured is the time in care, not necessarily the placements. But I might take that bit on notice anyway and see if I can find more information for you.

*[Supplementary Information No C4.]*

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I will make a comment on that because, of course, time is one element, but the disruption of multiple placements goes significantly to the degree of trauma that child is experiencing. Is that data being kept anywhere other than on individual files? Is there any centralisation of that data at all?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We will take that on notice and we will endeavour to provide whatever information we are available able to.

**The CHAIR:** We will make that part of C4.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** In August, I asked a parliamentary question about the cost of emergency accommodation arrangements for children who are in care, and the response indicated that information on the use of emergency accommodation was only available on individual case files. I am interested to know how much was spent during the 2018–19 year on emergency accommodation arrangements. Is this information available? If I am not able, is it broadly available?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We would not have it here. So, I will take the question on notice. I am not sure if it is going to be possible for us to give you a single kind of budget—and I do not mean budget in the formal sense of the budget papers. But I am not sure if it is going to be possible for us to give you a single line item number, but maybe. If I get Ms Tang to maybe question a little more what kind of data you are looking for.

**Ms TANG:** It is difficult because we only have it on individual files, but I am interested in what your understanding of an “emergency” is.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Things like hotels, other short-term accommodation arrangements—the sorts of emergency arrangements that obviously the taxpayer has to pay for—to get some idea about whether there is any sort of budget line item at all as to how much it is costing overall to have to have those accommodation arrangements?

**Ms TANG:** In terms of physical arrangements?

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Yes.

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**Ms TANG:** So buildings, whether it is a hotel cost or rental cost of a house?

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Correct.

**Ms TANG:** To be honest, I doubt that we will have that information. We will seek it out. Emergency really is about the ability to place with foster carers, which would be in a home or residential care arrangement —

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Which obviously does not incorporate cost, but I am interested—if that is not able to be picked up, how much is the taxpayer picking up? It is about trying to get an overall picture about, if you like, hidden costs that are having to be incorporated.

**Ms TANG:** I think we will have some difficulty.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I think the director general, who the committee would appreciate is a new director general, has been undertaking some work around the kind of governance and data collection. I might ask her to make some compensates about data collection in particular.

**The CHAIR:** Before we do that, I just do not want to lose the supplementary information number.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Thank you, Chair.

*[Supplementary Information No C5.]*

**Mrs ANDREWS:** It will not help answer your question today, but I want to give the committee some visibility about going forward so that you can see the broad intentions when you ask us these questions about our intention to be more accountable and transparent to the government, to the Parliament and to the community. We have been undertaking a review of the organisation as a whole, and that has been an internal review. It has also involved a significant consultation with all our key stakeholders, and there is a two-year program now going forward to improve our capabilities. One of the main themes is around governance accountability and transparency, and particularly in that space is around the data that we collect, and rolling that up for the analysis and reporting out and accountability. So, it is a key thing in the reform program going forward. I have had an officer start in my office this week who is on placement from the commonwealth Australian Bureau of Statistics for six months who will be overseeing that theme within the agency capability program. She comes with a broad suite of skills across the commonwealth, but has worked in state government as well.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I look forward to seeing the outcome of that. If you keep this data, it helps you look especially into the Department of Communities, which includes housing, and you can look at where money is being spent.

**Mrs ANDREWS:** Agreed.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Can I move on, please, minister, to Target 120. How many children were in the Target 120 program during the period of the annual report?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am going to see whether I can drive this file properly.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** And as part of that, how many families were engaged as well?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Just bear with me. So, the question again was about numbers.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** It was the number of children and also number of families.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** As at 11 November, 25 families involving 25 young people and 70 siblings were participating in the program.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Okay. Can I ask: were any of those children what were involved in Target 120 in care?



**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I will see if I can answer that. It does not tell me.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Can I take that on notice?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We can answer that. The director general has reminded me—she is quite right—that the policy is deliberately not about children in care; it is about families at risk and probably already connected with justice and case management and the theory being we intervene.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** So confirming none of those children is part of reunification program with parents or anything. They are all working within those family systems now.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** To be perfectly clear, if you are talking about children who are in the care of the state—that is, they have an order issued around their care, they are not in Target 120.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Okay. So, have any children or families started but then chosen not to continue with the Target 120 program?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I would be surprised if that was not the case, but maybe somebody is able to—I do not know—but we will take that on notice for you.

*[Supplementary Information No C6.]*

[1.00 pm]

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** As part of that question, if families are not continuing, is the department keeping records as to why they are saying they do not want to continue, and is any of that data being kept? Because it goes again to the efficacy of engagement.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I do not know that I can tell you. Can somebody else provide that?

**The CHAIR:** Okay, why do we not keep that as part of C6—if there is no-one participating; and, if not, why not?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Liam might be able to give you some preliminary comments.

**Mr CARREN:** I will talk first, and I think Jackie Tang wants to say a few words. What I will say about Target 120, at the core of it all, it is very data-driven, and the whole way that we look at targeting the clients, I suppose, is driven by data. We have a program board, a steering committee that involves Treasury, and they have a number of people who are heavily involved in data analytics. They are actually at the table with us, trying to assist us with the program to make sure that it is very much using the data we have available throughout the justice system and throughout the government. So, certainly, data is at the front of it all. That is the key point.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Can I ask, then, minister, because presumably the data is being kept, I am curious to know how many of the children who have been engaged have subsequently gone on to offend?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Would we have that information?

**Mr CARREN:** I do not have it here.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I have just been told that lots of data is being kept and that has been cross-departmental.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We can take it on notice; we do not have it here.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Great, if I could have that as well.

**The CHAIR:** We will also make that part of C6.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** The issue about the families has been picked up on notice as well, has it not?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes.

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**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Okay. Can I please refer to page 28, “Earlier Intervention and Family Support”. I note that 40 families have been provided with in-home support through the family care support service. Can I please ask how many families were supported at each location?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Do we have that information here?

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** It is the final paragraph.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I think Ms Tang can provide you with some information.

**Ms TANG:** Is this about all the earlier intervention programs?

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Yes. It states —

... the service has already provided 40 families across Kununurra, Port Hedland, Karratha, Northam, Broome and Perth ...

I am curious to know what the breakdown was for those families at each of those locations?

**Ms TANG:** I think there is probably a bigger story than that, if you are happy for me to give you an overview of the state service. Last year, just under \$100 million was allocated to the earlier intervention services that involved the Aboriginal in-home support service, which is a metropolitan-based service that is only for Aboriginal families; the intensive support service, which is statewide based, but not specific to Aboriginal people; then we have the family support network, which is around coordinating the services in a community; and then intensive support for families in that. One of the big issues that we hear across the state and with particular families is there are many services at the front door and probably at the back door and all around the house, but it is the lack of coordination to make the effect.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Always.

**Ms TANG:** This is the key issue of the family support network. I can talk through some of the stats in relation to the overall program; I do not have the actual breakdown for each individual one across the state, but we can take that on notice to do that. If you are happy for me to go through some of the stats for that, I think it is a significant aspect of the—overall, what I was advised as of 1 November is that for all the services across the state, we are actually having direct services to approximately 8 200 children. That is all the family support networks; that is the intensive work as well, the children counted within families, to the effect that they have. So this is significant. I think the particularly good news story is the Wungening Moort service within the metropolitan area. They have taken referrals up to about 205 for the time since they have started. That work is really important, because that is working in the home alongside the family, working with them as they are navigating systems, as they are seeking support, just helping kids to get to school, being there at mealtimes, helping. It is very direct work, which involves significant relationships. You need to build relationships with family. Wungening Moort had a relatively slow start, but it has really found its feet and is working really well with the families, and that is a real story of success.

**Hon COLIN TINCKNELL:** My questions are all on finance. First of all, can you turn to page 85. I am looking at the delivery of services for grants and resources. I want to ask what underpins the lower spending on grants and subsidies and funding for services?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Just for the purposes of clarification, honourable member, I am looking at page 85, too. Under that first table, it says “Cost of services”, “Expenses”, and there is a “Grants and subsidies” number in there. Is that where you are looking?

**Hon COLIN TINCKNELL:** Yes; first of all (a), “Grants and subsidies”, and then (b), “Funding for services”.

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**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Which is immediately below it in the table?

**Hon COLIN TINCKNELL:** Yes.

**Mr CARREN:** Sorry, can you quote the numbers you are referring to?

**Hon COLIN TINCKNELL:** Yes. On page 85 it refers to “Grants and subsidies”, and then the last one is “Funding for services”, so (a) and (b).

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Honourable member, in 2018, on that line, there was \$106 million, by the look of it, and in 2019 it was \$115 million, so it is actually an increase.

**Hon COLIN TINCKNELL:** Okay.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** If you compare those first two columns, which is “Care Arrangements for Children in the ... (CEO’s) Care 2019” with “Care Arrangements for Children in the ... (CEO’s) Care 2018”, it has actually increased.

**Hon COLIN TINCKNELL:** Okay. Sorry, that is a typo, then; I am sorry about that.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** And the same for the one below.

**Hon COLIN TINCKNELL:** Yes. The next one is referring to page 110 of the annual report. I note “Income from State Government” and the “Royalties for Regions Fund”. What accounts for the decline in funding from the regional community services account?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I will ask Liam to provide you with the explanation for that.

**Mr CARREN:** The royalties for regions funding is program based. It is related to specific projects and programs. The main almost exclusive difference between the two relates to the responsible parenting program, which was a program that ended during that period, and the clients that were part of that program were transitioned into the earlier intervention and family support strategy, which Jackie Tang actually spoke about a few minutes ago.

**Hon COLIN TINCKNELL:** Okay. My next question is on page 127. I refer to “Major Estimate and Actual (2019) Variance narratives” and the comment on salary savings measures. First, what salary savings measures is the department referring to; second, what was the expected savings for each of these measures at the time of 2018–19; and, third, what was the actual savings of each of those measures?

**Mr CARREN:** In terms of the narrative comment you are referring to there, the department went through a severance program during the year in question, and approximately 350 staff exited the organisation. That was done without any impact to frontline services. The staff who left were all in back office–type functions. As part of that program, there was a reduction to our budget, which equated to \$2.2 million within that year, so that is a key point in terms of the narrative around salary payments. As part of that program, there was a reduction to our budget, which equated to \$2.2 million within that year, so that is a key point in terms of the narrative around salary payments.

[1.10 pm]

**The CHAIR:** The deputy chair is very eagerly jumping in!

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Miscommunicated, sorry, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** You miscommunicated, Deputy Chair. Let us be very clear about that.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** It works both ways, but I am sure that the error is all mine. I learnt that a long time ago—it makes life a lot easier!

I just want to pick up the previous member’s focus on page 127—in particular, the statement of comprehensive income—and deal in a little bit more detail, if we can, with the employee benefits expense variation, which was a variation by more than \$28 million. It is accounted for by the wash

through of VTSS, but there is also a non-granular, and I will say brief, explanation, which was that it was also due to increased demand on frontline children protection services and the payment of unbudgeted long service leave. This is a note on page 127. Would it be possible to quantify what that increased demand for child protection services was? You read this and you think this is an unanticipated surge in demand, but that might be the wrong conclusion to draw. Could I ask you to elaborate on that, please?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We think we can provide you with an answer here.

**Mr CARREN:** Thanks, member, for the question. The department has a cost-and-demand model that was established some time ago with the Department of Treasury. Every year, there is basket of indicators that are looked at to try to determine what is the projected growth. Leading up to 2018–19, the reporting period in question, those discussions occurred and there was an initial budget increase of \$16.4 million that was included within the 2018–19 year that was based on a number of statistical indicators. The main one that we look at is called “interactions with child protection service”. Based on that model that was looked at in terms of the budget, there was a 4.3 per cent increase forecast, and that is what we have tended to see in the last few years—a three to five per cent increase in child protection demand. As the year played out, we saw that the interactions were more like seven per cent, which drove higher staffing requirements and higher salaries expenditure. That is the key narrative there.

In terms of the comment about unbudgeted long service leave, the department went on a program to reduce its leave liability balance, and that involved a number of strategies to try to reduce leave liability, some of those being payouts, so there was a bit of that that comes in there as well. Those are probably the key points.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Back to that seven per cent versus the regular 3.5 per cent to four per cent differential, is there a particular factor that drove that? That is actually almost a doubling in growth on that particular metric, so what is the driver?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am advised that it is the normal drivers, which are around domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse as well.

**Mr CARREN:** At the moment, we are having discussions with Treasury about that very issue. We are diving into the detail and looking at the stats to try and understand what is driving that and what it means to our costs and financials. There is also a number of discussions happening around how our service is configured around that. I think if you asked us that question in a few weeks’ time, we would probably be able to give you a better answer, but it is a bit of a work in progress.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Okay, so that requires further analysis. Is it nevertheless possible because of the variation that you have? Would it be possible to take on notice or as a supplementary how that \$28.3 million variation could be attributed to the three factors that you have identified on page 127, which is the increased demand on child protection service, the saving measures and the unbudgeted long service leave? If you are citing them as the factors, then, obviously, you are able to quantify those factors, and I would be interested in that as supplementary information.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We will take that on notice. Can I just make the point as well, honourable member, in respect to the drivers, which have not significantly changed but I suspect the quantum of the drivers has, and I suspect—I do not know this for a fact—you would see a correlation in emergency departments in hospitals and police interactions over the same period.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Yes. But if I did not, I would also, on the same count, think perhaps the forecasting methodology—I assume that that is the case, but if not, then that will invite further questions, as you would anticipate.

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[*Supplementary Information No C8.*]

**The CHAIR:** While we are at it, we have allocated C7 to the breakdown by location of the early intervention and family support services.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** This is a financial question. It might not pertain to the child protection function; it probably goes across the department; if so, please let me know. On page 105 under service 7, “Supplies and services”, there has been a significant increase between the 2018 year and the 2019 year of close to \$8 million on expenses attributed to consultants and contractors. Can I get an explanation for that variation, please?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I think that would go across the entire—but who knows? Mr Carren says he can provide you with an answer, so let us just give it a shot.

**Mr CARREN:** The amount that you are referring to relates almost exclusively to one specific issue. The department was funded by royalties for regions for some upgrades to a remote community that is around central remote municipal services infrastructure. There was a payment of \$8 million that occurred within that year, which is that variance. That was a once-off, abnormal payment.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Sorry, to whom was that payment made?

**Mr CARREN:** Contracts were awarded to providers who installed the infrastructure.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** So it was a regional infrastructure project?

**Mr CARREN:** That is right.

**The CHAIR:** And in the face of the withdrawal of municipal services by federal government funding?

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** You are not leading the witness in the answer that they provide, are you, Chair?

**The CHAIR:** It was a question! There was a question mark in relation to that.

**Mr CARREN:** The commonwealth withdrawal was in relation to housing —

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** So this is a Housing function?

**The CHAIR:** This is the provision of infrastructure.

**Mr CARREN:** Infrastructure—yes.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Good question, Chair.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** I am done.

**The CHAIR:** You are done? I am very pleased about that!

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Minister, page 26 of the annual report indicates that there were 5 379 children in care. How many children were taken to prison for visitations with a parent or another person during the reporting period?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Would we have that information? No, we do not have that information.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Is it able to be obtained?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Unless an officer wants to tell me otherwise, I suspect it might be case file by case file, in which case it would take an enormous amount of resources to try and find it, so it is not a commitment that I could give you. I am happy to answer any other questions that you might have about that matter.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** What is the current notification process that ensures that the department is informed in the event that a child in care’s parent is convicted of any offence?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I might get the director general, or whoever is appropriate, to answer that question in a minute. If I may be so bold and assume that your interest was perhaps triggered by a particular matter that got some media attention quite recently, I can make some comments around that. For example, legal advice was sought about the scope of a VRO and I am advised that there was conflicting or different advice given about the scope of that VRO. I will also make this comment—and I know that you are deeply concerned about child protection matters—in every decision around child protection, the best interest of the child is always taken into account.

[1.20 pm]

It is not always the case that the circumstances are neatly black and white. There is often—in fact, in probably the vast majority of cases—it is grey, and child protection officers have to make judgement calls where they balance a range of things, including, for example, is it in the best interests of a child to have a relationship with a parent irrespective of what those parents may or may not have done? If the question mark is maybe or maybe not, is it safe for the child? Let us look at the circumstance in which the contact is going to happen. Is safety able to be guaranteed in that particular physical environment, for example? All of those things are taken into account and, ultimately, a decision is made on the best information available and the best judgement that the child protection worker is able to exercise. Having said that, every day child protection workers have to make decisions about things the rest of us do not want to think about, never mind have to make a decision about. One child protection worker might make a different decision or a different judgement to another child protection worker when given exactly the same circumstances and with exactly the same policies and guidelines to follow. I make those general comments, but I will ask the director general to talk about whatever she is able to add to the answer.

**Mrs ANDREWS:** Firstly, I comment that the minister appears to have done the training course for child protection workers.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I was the minister, and it was a very difficult portfolio.

**Mrs ANDREWS:** The issue is well covered in terms of both the training of the caseworkers and the policy and practice manuals that support their work. There are principles articulated, which I can go through again, but the minister has really outlined all of them. There is good policy, procedures and practices sitting around the officers to support them in their decision-making. You were asking about reporting and analysis, I think, around all of that. Again, the information currently sits in individual case files.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** My question was: what is the current notification process that ensures that the department is informed in the event that a child in care's parent is convicted of any offence?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** How are you notified that parent X or Y has been convicted —

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Has been convicted of the murder of the other —

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** — when you have already got the child in care? How are you notified of that?

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** What is the mechanism?

**Ms TANG:** We are not necessarily notified as a matter of course, because it is done through the courts. The caseworker, if they were following up on that, would try to establish that, but it is not, from my knowledge, automatically notified from a court process through to our department.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** This is not a criticism, because it is not your fault if you are not told about it, but that is an unacceptable gap, in my view, in the system—that there is not communication happening between whoever has that information and the department that is responsible for that child in care, least of all in circumstances where it may well be safe—physically safe—to be bringing a child into

a prison to visit the convicted murderer of that child's mother. It might be physically safe to do that, but I cannot accept that it is psychologically safe and not re-traumatising for that child, in circumstances in which a court of law has said beyond reasonable doubt that that person has done that. I think that is a gap that needs to be addressed and I would ask for the minister to draw that to the attention of the minister responsible for this department.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I will do that, and I have two officers leaning forward looking like they want to say something. I will let them do that in a minute, but I will make this comment: I was serious when I made the comment before that two child protection workers with exactly the same policy documents in front of them and the same information in front of them might make different decisions. Myself, personally, I would have erred on the side of not, but there may be others who decide that the overriding concern for them—the one that they put most weight on in that particular set of circumstances—is that every child is entitled to a relationship with their parent. What every child wants is the bad stuff to stop, but every child wants a relationship with their parent. But I will let the director general go first, and then the assistant director general.

**Mrs ANDREWS:** I thank the member for bringing that to our attention. I will also commit to have that on the agenda. We have established regular meetings with the head of Justice. That will be on the agenda for our next meeting. There is a broad commitment to look at improving the information sharing across our organisations. Clearly, we have been prioritising what those things are and it has been around children in care already. This particular aspect has not come up, but it will be on the agenda.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Thank you.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am sorry. I know you have more questions, but do you want to add anything, Ms Tang?

**Ms TANG:** I would probably just make the comment that at the point someone may be in prison—remanded in prison, but not actually convicted—the element that that is an unknown until the conviction and the sentence has been imposed. The other is that it is not a secret that I spent a significant period of time working in my career within prisons. An element of that is absolutely family connection. Some people are in prison only for a very short period of time and others are for much longer. It is about that ability to connect with family when you are sober, when you are thinking about your future and when it is probably the safest place for you to connect in a meaningful way with your children to have a purpose for the future. It is something which is very much around the focus of family visits. I appreciate that for some cases it seems very black and white that that is what you do not do, but as a principle, the irony is that it is probably a very unique opportunity to start to build some very positive relationships in that very constrained and supported environment.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Sure. And the principle needs to be: do not re-traumatise the child.

**Ms TANG:** Absolutely.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** I refer to the response to my question prior to hearing 2, in which it was stated that 255 children were in self-selected arrangements. I ask: at what age does the department allow children in care to self-select their accommodation arrangements?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I read it last night in anticipation, but I want an explanation of what self-selected care is first, and an explanation of at what point a child is able to do that. Who can provide me with that?

**Ms TANG:** I would probably use different language, minister.

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**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** I should hasten to add that that is just the language in the answer that came back. That is not my language.

**The CHAIR:** It is in the answer.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** It is signed by the minister—255 children in self-selected arrangements.

**Ms TANG:** It may be that they are self-selected, but not necessarily endorsed by the department. It is not a direct science. I think you all appreciate that. The younger the child, we would be looking at—it is really hard to pick an age but it is also maturity—when you are talking about maybe 14 or 15 upwards, you are then saying the child is constantly running away, self-selecting, and the placement is unendorsed. It is the extent to which you can support that arrangement and stay in contact with that family to be able to encourage the child to go back to a placement which you feel should be the endorsed placement or put more supports around that particular family. We cannot physically just remove people from grandma or an aunty if that—that is further traumatising. The younger the child, you then have to say what are the safety elements of that and to what extent do you actually strongly encourage maybe other family members, or this is where we might involve an organisation such as Wungenning Moort or other intensive family support to be able to go in and maybe not the department being on the front door, but to be talking to the family about what it is to help support that child or support that family to be a safe environment. I know it is frustrating when we respond this way because it is not a direct answer, but it is an understanding that that there are age groups, there is maturity, and then there is the ability to support placements.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** There is no frustration. I think it is quite a reasonable response. Are any of the 255 that have self-selected their arrangement—would any of them be homeless?

**Ms TANG:** They could possibly be homeless. That may be their selection—that they are couch surfing.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Irrespective of whether they are homeless or otherwise, the cohort that self-select, do they then forgo any of the financial support that would normally then be provided or given to the care provider?

**Ms TANG:** That is the ability to track that, because the payment does not directly go to the child; it goes to the carer. A child might be in a home and might come home for a weekend and then go off for a couple of weeks and come back. The ability to track that is difficult. But if you are wanting to make the endorsed placement stable, then it is not about stopping the checks or starting the checks, it is about saying, “How can we make that supporting?” But it does not actually go to the child.

[1.30 pm]

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** I note that the workload reports for the months of January to June 2019—the second half of the reporting period—indicated that between 83 and 111 caseworkers were carrying caseloads over the desired limit of 15. Are you able to provide for us, for each month in the reporting period, how many caseloads were over 18?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I cannot; I am going to rely on the director general.

**Mrs ANDREWS:** Would you mind repeating the question? I am now chasing some information.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** I am trying to find out how many caseloads were over 18. I already have the information on who was over 15 during the reporting period.

**Mrs ANDREWS:** I do not think we have that information here.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We will take that on notice.

[*Supplementary Information No C9.*]

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**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Is anyone able to tell me, just quickly, whether there would be any caseloads over 18? There should not be.

**Ms TANG:** There should not be. The Industrial Commission says that they should be sitting at 15, at a stretch 18, and at times it may go over. What we are saying is that that should not happen. It is up to the district director to be looking at their caseloads each day to be able to monitor that, because we have actually looked at a way to try in the system to be not able to do that. We do not want to be backtracking. It is about managing each day to ensure that we comply with the industrial agreement, for a start, let alone that that is the maximum caseload that they should be managing, quite aside from the Industrial Commission.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** So when you are going to get this data for each month of the reporting period to determine whether, at any time, somebody was over 18, when you run the data, are you just running it at the end of the month? For example, in the month of June, it might have been on 3 June that somebody was over a caseload of 18, but on 30 June they were not. I just want to know if at any time they were over 18. Is that able to be ascertained?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** If you are able to indicate—I mean, worst-case scenario, if it has to be a single point snapshot.

**Ms TANG:** We run this report every month. It is not supposed to be the way that the—districts should not rely on that; they should be running their own records. They can run it off the system to say what the cases are. We run it at the end of each month to say what numbers have gone over and to absolutely have a second look at the quality assurance to say that this is not happening. But it is expected that the district director would be looking each day, literally, if they are running the caseloads, not just waiting for the end of the month, but they are looking at allocations. Team leaders, when they are allocating cases as they come in the door, need to know what each caseworker has as a case, and then what the complexity of those cases are, and managing that. It is not about shifting the stats around to be at the end of the month when you run a point in time; that is absolutely not what we do. The head office running of the stats is a backup to the daily expectation that it is run within a district.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Will the head office report at the end of the month tell you if, at any time during the month, someone was over 18?

**Ms TANG:** It will only tell you at a point in time. Otherwise you would have to run it every day, and even then it might be 19 at 10 o'clock in the morning, and 17 or 15 at three o'clock in the afternoon.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** I refer to page 26 of the annual report, and the 3 230 registered foster carers that are listed. Can you please provide us some information about what the department is doing to support foster carers and children in care?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Foster carers are really an absolutely critical part of how the child protection system works in Western Australia, and have been for a long time. I know that the department has a good working relationship with the Foster Care Association, and indeed with other foster care organisations across Western Australia. I will get the director general to make some comments more specifically about how support is provided, but I am advised by the minister that, in October this year, statewide consultations commenced on the Foster Carer Refresh, which is the team visiting every single district to meet with family carers, foster carers and staff and to get feedback on how to improve foster care and support foster carers. To date, in mid-November, I am advised that nine districts have been visited so far. But I will get the director general to add some additional information.

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**Mrs ANDREWS:** As the minister said, it is one of the most important elements of the system we are running to support children, and there have certainly been some challenges put to us by them about improving the way in which we listen to them and support them, and our responsiveness to their changing needs, and so a quite deliberate program is being put in place to strengthen the daily interactions at a regional level, as well as working quite purposefully with the advocacy voices, and listening to them. Jackie Tang is going to be able to speak more specifically to the work that her team and the regional services areas as well have been doing across the state over the past few months. Before she does, just to mention for me, I travelled to Bunbury about five or six weeks ago and met with some of the foster carers there myself. It was certainly very humbling and pretty inspiring for me, and I came back even more determined, I think, to look at how the department is supporting those groups. It is not just what we are doing, but it is how the other government agencies are supporting them as well. The principle of prioritising children in care's access to the services that government provides them, is one that we need to be ensuring is flowing through all of government, whether it is the health system or the education system. For me, I have taken that up with the other directors general as well. Jackie, did you want to speak more specifically on this?

**Ms TANG:** I have at least monthly meetings with Fay Alford, who heads up the Foster Care Association, and let me assure you, she tells you, for good and for bad, how the foster care system is going, and she has tentacles out there—her involvement and commitment. In relation to the Refresh project, which is actually run out of Helen's area, it is spending a dedicated period of time actually sitting and listening to what are the concerns for foster carers, ranging from just understanding what is the language of our business, what are the financial supports that can be gained, how do we train to work with children who are traumatised? With our own children we have difficulties, let alone when there are children who are very traumatised, and how to support. That work is occurring across the state and Fay's staff member will accompany each of those forums. In particular the south west forum, has been, particularly with the regional team with Rachael Green—a lot of commitment has been given to the south west team, and I understand the minister has also visited on a number of occasions and also met with the Foster Care Association. This is a time when we must listen. We have not necessarily had our ears open before, but they are crucial to the work that we do and also they have great knowledge about the system and are able to support them in their work.

[1.40 pm]

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Is 3 230 enough foster carers or is there demand for more?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** You can always use more. There is not a shadow of a doubt that you can always use more, and particularly Aboriginal foster families. The primary principle is always a safe placement, but where it is able to be a safe placement and culturally appropriate, that is what the department aims to do. It is a big ask to ask someone to take another child into their home. It is an even bigger ask when that child comes with a history of trauma that might present itself in any manner or way. Particularly when foster carers have their own children, you are asking them to put at risk the relationships inside the household as well, as it can be quite disruptive while a child settles in. It is an enormous ask on people. Having said that, we can always use more.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I refer to page 29 and the reference to Kalgoorlie kids. I note that at June 2019, there were seven families that were open to the Kalgoorlie–Boulder Earlier Intervention and Family Support Service. That seems like quite a low number. Is there a target number?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Good question. I will ask Jackie Tang to give you some comments.

**Ms TANG:** I do not believe there is a target number as such. The issue of working very intensely with families is the fact that it has to be a devotion of time and effort to bring about the change. The

number in itself is small but there is a reason for that—to make sure that the resources are devoted. It might seem like a lot of money to a small number of people but you can get the returns because you are actually bringing about change for that family.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Is there a waiting list for that program?

**Ms TANG:** I do not know if there is a waiting list. There certainly would be people who would be considered suitable to go on the program. A decision would be made locally about what families to bring on and the complement and what staff skills are available to bring those families on.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Can I please ask on notice, Chair, whether there is any sort of waiting list? I am curious to know how many people who may be deemed suitable are not able to access that service. A further question, not necessarily on notice, is: how are people being referred to that service?

**The CHAIR:** Can I just deal with the supplementary first. So, the waiting list —

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Is there a waiting list? There may not be. I am curious to know whether there are other families. I hear what you are saying. What you are saying is that you do not want to compromise the comprehensiveness of the service that is being provided to those seven families. I want to get an idea of whether there is a waiting list of other families that may be deemed suitable to access it.

**Ms TANG:** Excuse my ignorance, because I do not directly manage that Kalgoorlie project. I would say that there is the group that currently gets a service and then, either through community staff, police or education, which is the multidisciplinary approach, they would say that if a family dropped out or hopefully succeeded and moved on to better opportunities, there would be families who would be next in mind to be considered for that inclusion.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I absolutely understand that; that is what I want to get an idea of.

**The CHAIR:** If we take that as the process around the Kalgoorlie project, which might include people waiting to get in.

*[Supplementary Information No C10.]*

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** And seeing if they can quantify the number of families that may be trying to get in. How is the referral to this program being undertaken? Is it being done by this multidisciplinary team that you were referring to?

**Ms TANG:** I cannot speak specifically, so I will not comment. I have an idea how it would be done, but I cannot say specifically how it is done.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Can I take that on notice too, please? I would like to get more information.

**The CHAIR:** We will include that as part of C10.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I have a series of other questions about this service as well. I will see whether I need to get them also taken on notice. I want to know of the families who have accessed the service—it says that since the service began in March 2017 there have been 17 families—how many have subsequently had their children taken into care?

**Ms TANG:** I cannot answer that.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Another thing I want to know is: how many of those children have subsequently been involved with the youth justice system?

**Ms TANG:** I cannot answer that.

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**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Okay. I will take that on notice, too. I have a simple question, which hopefully you will be able to answer. Is youth justice involved with this model as well?

**Ms TANG:** I believe they are.

**The CHAIR:** Let us make all of those questions part of C10.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I refer to page 30 and the item “Leaving care”. I notice in answers to parliamentary questions that it has already been identified that the department is not collecting data on the living circumstances of care leavers. We know, of course—it is well acknowledged—that care leavers are at particular risk of homelessness and other areas of vulnerability. Why is the department not collecting that data? I know that there may be concerns about privacy provisions, but surely that could be addressed by seeking consent or data linkages or de-identified data. Why is that data not being kept?

**Ms TANG:** If I can just clarify the question: why do we not know where a young person who has left care is now living?

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Yes. I know the big concern around privacy, but there are ways you can work around that. We know that cohort of people has been identified as particularly vulnerable; why is the department not keeping that data? Also, is there any intention to look at keeping the data in the future?

**Ms TANG:** I would probably comment by saying that we might know where a young person is going as their first address when they leave care, but once they leave care, they are individual adults who are going into the community, so it is very difficult to track them. I think that the focus we currently have—certainly sharpened by the Auditor General’s report—is that we start leaving care much earlier. We have talked about that in the past but we have —

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Let me clarify. She does not mean that they leave care earlier. You mean that you start the process for helping them.

**Ms TANG:** Yes; sorry. The process of considering young people who are leaving care and starting the process to support them occurs earlier—if I could just clarify that.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Which was one of the recommendations from the Auditor General’s report.

**Ms TANG:** Yes, I mean 14 or 15 years. One of the aspects of that is having specialised teams. We have a specialised team in Midland, which is purely around supporting those young people who are in that cohort. We have also had a specialist team organised for Fremantle, so rather than dealing with a mix of age groups, they are actually working with a group of care leavers. Then you have a specialist team of staff who work in this area and know the contacts and enjoy and are connecting with that cohort. We are looking at opportunities across the regions as well. It is a little bit more difficult to have specialised teams in the regions because young people and staff are dispersed, so they are looking at models of how to give a focus to leaving care to give that emphasis. The benefit of the housing department and child protection coming together is that we now have an opportunity—we are doing this—of working with young people and not necessarily putting them on a waitlist for housing, but certainly identifying their needs. Housing for singles is in demand and we need to be able to support young people into that, so we need to know how many young people are in that cohort. The other is a program, which is assisted rental pathways, to enable young people to enter the private rental scheme but support them. Just having a home and being able to pay the rent is not the answer, so we are really working with what are the housing opportunities, with child protection, to support young people much earlier.

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**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I just want to confirm that at this point the only data that is potentially being kept is the immediate transition from out-of-home care; there is no intention to capture longitudinal data.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** If I may, Chair, in terms of intention, can I get Helen to make some comments about that?

**Ms NYS:** I can also speak to what data is collected and why we do not have something more specific to answer your questions. As Ms Tang said, we maintain records and we maintain details of where the child is living until the age of 18. At that point, they are deemed to have left care. Our leaving care support services are largely provided by the non-government sector, so they may well keep records. But it is an opt-in service. If young people choose to engage with the leaving care services, then they know where they are, but if they choose not to, there is no mechanism for tracking them or keeping up with where they might have moved to. We have intermittent data. For some children, we will know very well where they are, but for other children we will not. Speaking to where we are aiming to go as a department and improve our work in this area, you might be aware of the Home Stretch pilot.

[1.50 pm]

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Yes, I was going to ask questions about that in a moment.

**Ms NYS:** Shall I stop and wait for the question?

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I wanted to ask how long is the Anglicare trial that is providing that support going to be funded for?

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** For 12 months.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Yes, but is there any anticipation that that is going to be ongoing?

**Ms NYS:** The pilot that has been announced is a 12-month pilot and that is indeed what it is. It is 12 months because we will not be taking any more young people into the scheme beyond 12 months. But we are very clear that having brought young people into the Home Stretch and setting them up with supports and services, we cannot then just disconnect, so any young people, and it is up to 15, who come into the pilot—we are at 14 now; I was actually at a steering committee meeting last night—we will continue to support those young people up until the age of 21 unless they choose to withdraw earlier. So the support for them does not cease at 12 months.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Yes, but it is a small number.

**The CHAIR:** Honourable member, you need to make this your last question.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** No worries. I was just wondering how many young people transitioned out of care in 2018–19?

**Ms NYS:** I know for a fact that it is around 180 to 200 children per year leaving care across the state.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** This is following on from an earlier discussion about caseloads and the like. I realise that team leaders are responsible for managing the monitored list. How many cases are team leaders allowed to personally manage?

**Ms TANG:** When they do not actually manage cases themselves, they are supervising others, but what is allocated to them is the monitored list for that group. But when we are talking about case management as opposed to being on the monitored list, the intensity of the work is different.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Yes, but what is the number of monitored cases that a team leader can have?

**Ms TANG:** I cannot tell you that we have a specific number that says that it is in excess, but it is a monitored list that we are constantly moving down.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** So the team leader is supervising their team. The team might have cases, up to 15, possibly even up to 18 cases. Those 15 or 18 cases are not cases on the monitored list.

**Ms TANG:** No.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** In addition to that, there is this monitored list that the team leader is responsible for. Are they the ones doing the monitoring?

**Ms TANG:** If something arises through the duty officer or through court or any matter, then that is brought to their attention. If what has come to light requires action, it is not necessarily the team leader who will do that work. A decision might be made that day to say actually we need to reactivate that case and allocate it to a caseworker. So there is not this view that the team leader is managing everything to do with what is on the monitored list. What they are effectively doing is that it is allocated to them to monitor whether in fact a caseworker should be assigned to that case because of a matter that might have come to light that requires more intense work.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Can I add to that. The numbers on the monitored list would go up and down depending on what had come to light and whether that case had then been allocated to a caseworker.

**Ms TANG:** Yes.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** In this famous file that people have at their disposal, does it have information about how many are on the monitored list at a particular point in time? How many would be on the monitored list today or on 30 June? No?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** No, it would not, because you would have to go district by district.

**Ms TANG:** We would have a report. I think the last period was showing as of 9 October, and that will show you a point in time.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** I have got 9 October, monitored list per district. Is that possible to obtain?

**Ms TANG:** It is an early date in October. If it is not the 9 October —

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** So the October monitored list per district.

**Ms TANG:** Yes.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Can we take that on notice?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Can I take that I notice? Will that be numbers? We do not want anything identified.

**Ms TANG:** It would be the numbers, and the monitored list includes both children in care and other cases, just to be clear, because there is a definition around that. Can I also make the point that the monitored list at times looks like it is the same numbers, so if it is 50 who are on the monitored list, it is not the same 50 cases in two days' time; it is an allocation process.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Yes. I just want to have a general sense as to how many children ordinarily are on the monitored list and how many team leaders ordinarily there are, because that will then give us an indication as to, on average, how many cases are being monitored per team leader.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We will take that on notice.

*[Supplementary Information No C11.]*

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**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** I refer to the 1 938 Viewpoint surveys that were reported on page 29 of the annual report. In what setting are the computer-based, self-interviewing surveys conducted? For example, are they conducted at home or in a departmental office?

**Ms TANG:** They are done on iPads, so it might be through a contact with a caseworker, a family resource worker or a case support officer, because the preference is that if I am the caseworker, I do not hand the iPad over and say, "Can you fill in Viewpoint?" because it is intimidating in the sense that you might have something to say about me. So we try to separate the actual completion of the Viewpoint process, the questions that are asked, from the person who might be there, the support person, you know, as their caseworker. We certainly do not ask foster carers to sit and do it. We want to get an understanding from the young person through all the questions that are being asked about whether they know about their education plans, whether they feel safe, whether there are things that might make them feel at risk. There are all those sorts of things, which they may not necessarily do all at one time. They may not necessarily have the attention to just sit down and do a number of questions. It might be done over a period of time to get a picture and build a relationship. The purpose of Viewpoint is not to get a questionnaire at a point in time and put it in the file. The purpose of Viewpoint is as a case management tool to have a starting point to talk to a young person about, "What are the things that you are proud of or that you are positive about and you want to talk about? What are the things that are worrying you and how can we work with you?" The difficulty of Viewpoint is that it is just seen as a point in time that is just here. It is absolutely a crucial tool to get a starting point and an understanding from that young person.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** So, as a starting point, conversation is started between the state and the child. Is there a similar mechanism or tool with carers?

**Ms TANG:** No, there is not currently.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Do we know whether there is such a thing in another jurisdiction?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I cannot answer that last question about whether there is something in another jurisdiction, but I will get Ms Nys to make some comments about carers. I will also make this point: the foster carers association is a very well organised, powerful voice for carers. I do not want you to underestimate Fay Alford for one second! There is a voice there for both systemic issues affecting carers and then individual matters affecting carers, but I will ask Ms Nys to add some comments.

**Ms NYS:** I just really want to make clear that this is absolutely one of the areas that we are discussing with carers as part of the foster care refresh. The intent of the work is around looking at the assessment process, the approval process and then very much how we can improve the way that we work with foster carers as partners in the care plan for children. Those conversations have included how we can ensure that there is a system for them to let us know what is working and what is not working in a way that they do not feel that there is going to be any consequence for them, so, similar to Viewpoint, very much a means by which they can give free and frank advice back to us, and we are talking to them about what that might look like and how we could do that. It is particularly, I think, important for kinship carers, where they are very concerned that the information they give us does not in any way lead to a perception that it might impact on their continued support for the child. That is not our position, but you can understand that some families might feel that, so we are looking at a way that we can ensure they get that information up to us.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** What is the age range that is intended to be captured by the Viewpoint surveys?

**Ms TANG:** I think it is above seven. There is not the one questionnaire. There is obviously a younger group.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** There are variations.

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**Ms TANG:** And it is a different style of questionnaire to the different cohort, and then it is reported back depending on the cohort.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks everyone. It finishes now. You will have the opportunity to put further questions on notice. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. The committee will forward the transcript of evidence, which highlights any questions taken on notice and any additional questions that members may have after Friday, 29 November. Responses to these questions are requested to be returned within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. Should you be unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. If members have any unasked questions, I ask them to submit these via the electronic lodgement system on the POWAnet site by 5.00 pm on Friday, 29 November. Once again, thank you everyone for your involvement today.

**Hearing concluded at 2.01 pm**

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