

**SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

ONGOING BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARINGS 2010–11

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
TUESDAY, 20 JULY 2010**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Hon Philip Gardiner (Chair)
Hon Liz Behjat
Hon Ken Travers**

Hearing commenced at 9.33 am

McSWEENEY, HON ROBYN
Minister for Community Services,
sworn and examined:

BARTNIK, MR EDDIE
Acting Director General, Department for Communities,
sworn and examined:

WALTON, MR PETER
Executive Director, Corporate and Business Support, Department for Communities,
sworn and examined:

WITHERS, MS STEPHANIE
Executive Director, Redress WA, Department for Communities,
sworn and examined:

MacARTHUR, DR KARIN
Executive Director, Community Engagement, Department for Communities,
sworn and examined:

DAWKINS, MS MARGARET
Acting Executive Director, Policy and Planning, Department for Communities,
sworn and examined:

JOHNSON, MR CHRISTOPHER
Director, Financial and Resource Management, Department for Communities,
sworn and examined:

PILKINGTON, MR JONATHON
Director, Childcare Licensing and Standards, Department for Communities,
sworn and examined:

The CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I welcome you to this meeting. Before we begin, we need to administer the oath or affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

The CHAIR: You will have signed a document entitled “Information for Witnesses”. Have you read and understood that document?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you may refer to during the course of this hearing for the record. Please also be aware of the microphones. If those at the back wish to make a contribution, please come up to the table so that you can be heard through the microphones. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. 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. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please

note that the uncorrected transcript should not be published or disclosed. This prohibition does not, however, prevent you from discussing your public evidence generally once you leave the hearing. Government agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting Parliament to scrutinise the budget papers on behalf of the people of Western Australia, and the committee values your assistance. Members, it would assist Hansard if, when referring to the budget statement volumes or the consolidated fund estimates, you could please give the page number, item, program and amount in preface to your questions. Apologies for our chairman, Hon Giz Watson, who is in London and for Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich, who is unable to be with us today.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I refer to page 718 of the *Budget Statements*. Can the minister provide a detailed budget for the strategic policy and coordination youth item? I understand that youth was potentially going to be excluded today. Can you clarify that?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I am not the Minister for Youth so I will not be answering on behalf of the Minister for Youth.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I refer to the fifth dot point on page 719, which relates to Redress WA. What support programs are available for adult survivors of childhood abuse? Are there any group programs or programs in addition to the standard Medicare-funded counselling sessions?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: There has been ongoing counselling for the victims of trauma but recently we have done some more counselling for them. We spent \$3 million and assisted 18 agencies across the state. There is support while they wait for offers and group work, plus nine agencies are available to do counselling. Five agencies have agreed to provide individual counselling as requested by an applicant. We are still in discussions with another four agencies. I recognise the importance of counselling for people who have been victims of abuse. Some of the stories—I say “stories” lightly—and real life experiences of some people is absolutely horrific and traumatic. Counselling is very important and the government recognises that. We have an active helpdesk which speaks to, on average, 1 000 applicants a month. A lot of people ring that helpdesk. Social workers and support staff are trained to take calls. We have regular newsletters. A memorial for all children in care in the cultural precinct will open at the end of this year. When Redress applicants accept their offer, they are sent an apology letter that is signed by me and the Premier and they are given assistance to access their records of care.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I am happy to take this on notice. You mentioned that there are several options available for counselling through a variety of government agencies. Can you provide a breakdown of exactly what programs are available and from what agencies for Redress applicants?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I will ask Stephanie Withers to provide a bit more information.

Ms Withers: The important thing to remember is that there are pre-existing issues with all our applicants and our obligation is to get them through the Redress process; and, if possible, if they have sustained severe trauma and they need ongoing care for them to be referred on to an ongoing service, because Redress will close down by the middle of next year. If you look at the counselling services that Redress offers in that context, as the minister described we offered counselling to help people do their applications, because it raised issues for them. We have offered group work support. Hundreds of people have attended short-term group work throughout the state with the idea that if there are ongoing issues, they need to be referred on. You may be aware that under Medicare the federal government funds both individual and group counselling. The idea is that we need to refer our applicants to ongoing support funded by another provider. In addition, as the minister described, we have just introduced a short-term counselling option of up to three funded sessions by Redress with the possibility of more if the client is really traumatised. That was introduced a few weeks ago and we have already paid 50 clients to attend counselling.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Do the clients determine who they get counselling with? If they have a continuing relationship with someone, it can add to that.

Ms Withers: If they have a continuing relationship with someone, our objective is to get them to enter the Medicare arrangement. There is no point setting up a long-term dependency relationship under Redress. There are a lot of counselling services available in the community for both Indigenous and child migrants. You are probably aware that the CEBA service and the Child Migrant Trust are funded beyond Redress. We have funded both of them to support applicants through the process, but they have their own ongoing funding. We also sent applicants a booklet on services available. One of the roles of the helpdesk is to link people. As the minister described, social workers and psychologists are on the helpdesk. Their objective is to assess the level of trauma that a person is experiencing and to link them through their GP to a private psychologist and to an ongoing service.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Does the government have any plans to provide Redress for lost wages for children who are in state care?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No; not at this stage.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Can we get an explanation for why that is the case?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I said no—perhaps I was a bit hasty. I have not heard of that and I will not be instigating that. At the moment I am interested in servicing Redress clients and in doing that well and properly and getting them counselling and getting them their payment. By the middle of 2011 the Redress system will be closed.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I am happy to provide the minister with information about people who have approached me about this matter.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: I struggle with budget papers and working out why things are put in and why they are taken out. I refer to the fourth dot point on page 718 of the *Budget Statements* and to the Redress scheme for children and young people abused in the care of the state. There is a figure of \$89-plus million, but there is an actual figure of \$23 million. That is a huge discrepancy. I do not understand how that arises. Can you explain that for me?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: The member will recall that changes were made to the maximum funding levels under the restructuring of the scheme and the issuing of new guidelines. The \$114 million was still there. The Labor government promised \$114 million even though it was told it should have been \$200 million. When we came to government, we honoured the \$114 million. The scheme needed to be reconstructed. The new assessment process of the scheme requires a longer period of time, which means that the bulk of expenditure from 2009-10 was deferred until this financial year. Since the payments commenced in February 2010, Redress has been averaging 40 payments a week, although that has increased to 96 payments a week. The target was around 95 and it has gone up.

[9.45 am]

Western Australia has never implemented a scheme such as Redress before so many assumptions had to be made on how applicants would be assessed and processed. Now that payments are being made those processes are being reviewed and improved. Progress was slow as the oldest and the sickest applicants were being paid first—which makes a lot of sense and is what I asked Redress to do—and these records can date back more than 50 years and can be very difficult to access. Part of the problem is the accessing of that. Also, approximately 40 per cent of the applications received are not fully complete and require further information and follow-up. It is expected that the payment rate will rise to approximately 100 a week within the next few weeks and we have reached that target. But having said that, I think that you wanted a bit more information around that—or does that satisfy your question?

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: So it just means that we do not—that we just defer it off until later on, but that the money stays there; it is not disappearing out of the —

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No, the money is certainly not disappearing out of that. It is quarantined and \$90.2 million is for payments and the rest is for the administration and —

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: So there is nothing in the forward years, presumably because by then everyone will have been paid and the scheme will come to an end.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes. The scheme will come to an end.

The CHAIR: To clarify: of that \$114 million, \$90.2 million is for distribution to the recipients, and therefore the administration costs are expected to be around \$24 million.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes—\$24.1 million.

The CHAIR: That is roughly 25 per cent for administrative costs.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Administration, support services and counselling. It is to —

The CHAIR: Does this include social work and psychological work?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes.

The CHAIR: If I can just continue that a bit further: is it your view that the service you are providing is satisfying the demand that is there?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Redress is a very difficult area. I keep saying that because it is an extremely difficult area to deal with. It is difficult for the people who have been traumatised and it is difficult for the people who work at Redress. I say difficult for the people who work at Redress because they are the ones dealing with the victims who are phoning up; they are the ones who are reading the terrible stories about the people who have suffered and what they have gone through. As I have said, it has never been done before in this state. I am aware that there is a demand out there. As I have said, 1 000 calls a month are made to Redress. People are always anxious. People like to know when their money is coming; what money they are getting; and when that money is going to come through. Some of those people ring up two or three times a week. That is understandable, given what they have gone through. I am saying it is traumatic for both sides—the people who work in Redress and the victims of abuse. I recognise that.

The CHAIR: I suspect that this is the first time that they have had a service from which they can seek support—often, I suspect.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes, they can ring in and, as Stephanie said, we have counsellors and we have social workers. The people on the other end of the phone are very, very understanding. We have made sure of that because, for me, there would be nothing worse than somebody who is traumatised ringing up to hear, “What’s your problem?—bang!” That does not happen. We are very, very careful about the people we employ, and that is the way it is going to stay.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Are you able to provide a breakdown of that \$24.1 million and how much is for support and counselling and how much is for administration?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes, I am happy to do that.

Ms Withers: So far we have spent over \$2.3 million on support to help applicants do their applications. In terms of group work support: to be honest I do not know what we are actually up to now, but it is several hundred thousand dollars. I can provide those figures. The breakdown for the rest of the costs is administration. We have a budgetary allocation, as you can see, of some \$20 million. At the moment, we have not established exactly how much of that money we will spend. We were given that allocation. My suspicion is that we will not spend it all. One of the issues that I am not clear about is what the demand will be for the ongoing support that we have just introduced. In fact, the demand has been quite high. As I said, we only introduced it a few weeks ago and we have already had 50 people apply. One of my issues is that it is very difficult for me to budget, when I am actually meeting a demand.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: If you do not spend that \$20 million by the time all the scheme payments are made and you have not used it for administration costs and you have some left over—will that remain in your budget for ongoing support for these people or will it go back into consolidated?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It is my intention that if people need counselling and ongoing counselling, we will give them what they require; when I looked through this scheme that was one of the highest priorities that I have. If money is left over, it will be used for something to do with Redress; it will not be —

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Is it quarantined for Redress?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I am saying that it is quarantined for Redress, and I will uphold that. That money is for Redress and Redress people. That is the way it is going to be.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: If you do not have the information here today, can we have taken on notice the breakdown of how much has been spent in each of the different categories and how much you expect to spend until the completion of the scheme? I realise the difficulties, but can you give us your current budget estimates for the expenditure of that money as supplementary information?

The CHAIR: Do you have that information here?

Ms Withers: No, but I can supply it.

The CHAIR: Thank you. You will supply the budgeted breakdown of actual, administrative —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: A breakdown of what has been spent so far in each of those categories and what they expect to spend between now and the completion of the scheme.

[Supplementary Information No A1.]

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I have my own questions about Redress, but my next question is: minister, you said that the previous government was told that it was going to cost \$200 million, but have you documentation that you can table that justifies that claim?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It is in *Hansard*. I read the transcript of the email that I received into *Hansard*. You can read very clearly in *Hansard* what it actually —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Are you not able to table for us?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No, I will not table it. It is in *Hansard*.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Why not?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Because I have probably lost the copy that I had because I put it in *Hansard*.

The CHAIR: I think that we can access that —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Well, I find it extraordinary that you are not prepared to table a document that you say that you have, but anyway —

The CHAIR: The only issue will be if it is not in *Hansard*, but the minister has said it is in *Hansard*.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Yes, but there is a difference. I mean, minister did you quote the full document, who it was emailed to and everything that was in it, or did you just quote parts of the document?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: You can read in *Hansard*; I quoted the document.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: No, I am asking now minister.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I quoted the document without the name of where it came from to protect the source.

Hon ALISON XAMON: But minister, we cannot then determine the veracity of that document. We do not know if it was someone off the street who emailed that document about it costing \$200 million or whether it was someone from Treasury. We do not know —

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Are you saying that I am dishonest?

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Are you questioning the minister?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Are you saying that I am dishonest; because I am certainly not.

Hon ALISON XAMON: No, minister. The point is that you are prepared to put stuff on an email and —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am asking you to justify your claim.

Hon ALISON XAMON: — that is fair enough, but we are not able to make our own determination on whether we would also put stuff on that email —

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I suggest that you go back to *Hansard* to read what I said, because what I said at the time is very clear; it is already documented.

The CHAIR: Minister, I understand what you have said about this issue of \$200 million is recorded in *Hansard*. I think the issue is more to the original source of the information about the \$200 million and, as I understood the question to be, I think that that goes beyond the *Hansard*. I think the question was about the source of the information about the \$200 million.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: The minister has already said that it was to protect the source.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I did say that it was to protect the source. I read into *Hansard* an email that I received from somebody who worked for the previous Labor government. I read into *Hansard* the email in which he said that he had told the government that it needed to provide \$200 million for the Redress scheme to work and to work properly and that the Labor government had said that it would provide \$114 million. I will not name that source, but I read into—I quoted everything that he said in that document—*Hansard*.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Did you receive that document as a minister?

The CHAIR: I think it was a document received.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Yes, but did you receive it as the minister?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I received an email.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: As the minister?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No, not as the minister.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Did you receive it before the election or after the election?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I cannot remember. I cannot recall. We will have to look in *Hansard*.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: You are making pretty broad claims based on this email; I would have thought that you might remember it in a bit more detail than you are coming up with at the moment.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No, I am not. I am sure that there is some documentation from before the Labor government fell. If I can find it, if I have those documents, I will provide them. But, I cannot recall.

The CHAIR: If people are satisfied about what we have heard here, given the context in which it has been said, that is fine. The alternative is that we seek the document and at the request of the minister hold it in private—if the committee makes that decision. However, if we are happy with the explanation, we will move on.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am not sure that I would say “happy”, but anyway —

The CHAIR: Okay, we are moving on.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am happy to move on.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: Could I just ask a question? It is not about the document, but about the figure it contains.

As some of you might know, I have been in Parliament for a few months. I am following this and trying to understand. Are you saying that \$200 million should have been spent on Redress? I understand that you are spending less than that, so what is the significance of the \$200 million?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: The significance of the \$200 million is that the previous Labor government said that it would pay up to \$80 000—that that would be the highest claim payment. When I came to office, I looked at the \$114 million budgeted and realised that we were never, ever going to be able to pay upwards of \$80 000 and that the highest payment that we could make would be up to \$45 000. The significance of what I am saying is that if there had been \$200 million in the budget, people most likely would have been paid up to the \$80 000 limit. However, by putting \$114 million in the budget, the Labor government must have always known, given that it had estimated that between 6 000 and 10 000 people would apply, that \$114 million was not enough.

[10.00 am]

One hundred and fourteen million is a lot of money. I am grateful that the Labor government came up with this scheme. It is a good scheme. The intention behind it was very good but the money that was put there was not enough for upwards of \$80 000. People were led to believe that they would get up to \$80 000. I thought that was very dishonest given that when it knew that \$200 million should have been placed there and went ahead with \$114 million, having a bit of an average and knowing how many people would apply, it was very hard to then go against that expectation that \$80 000 would be given when we had to look at the scheme. I had to redo the guidelines, which were not signed off, look at that scheme, and come up with the top figure of \$45 000.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: My next question is: have you considered topping up the scheme yourself since coming into government? We have a surplus now. You said we were dealing with people who have had horrendous experiences. The cap amount, as you say, has gone down from \$80 000 to \$45 000—was that a consideration that the department made, that that was something where more money should go?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It was a decision of cabinet that when we came into government we would honour that commitment of \$114 million. We have done that. The decision of cabinet was to go with the \$114 million and honour it.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Now that economic circumstances are better, have you reconsidered whether or not you can increase the payments to \$80 000? How many people would be eligible for the full \$80 000 if you did increase it?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: As I have said, it was a cabinet decision —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I heard what you said. I am asking you whether you have reconsidered since that cabinet decision.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: — and that is my answer to you.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: So you have not reconsidered it?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It was a cabinet decision that we would go with the top figure of \$45 000. That has not changed.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Are you saying that cabinet can never reconsider a matter once it has taken a decision on it?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I am saying on this matter cabinet made a decision that the top payment would be up to \$45 000 —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: And I am asking a very simple question: have you considered going back to cabinet and asking them to increase the payments to \$80 000 now that economic circumstances have improved?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: My answer to you is the same. I have gone to cabinet and cabinet have said that the top figure would be \$45 000 and the scheme will end next year, in the middle of 2011.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: That was almost two years ago. What I am asking is: have you reconsidered that position?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I do not know how many times I can say it. I went to cabinet —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Give me a yes or no answer to whether you have reconsidered your position.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No; I am not going to give you a yes or no.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Why will you not answer that question, minister?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I am answering your question.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: What are you embarrassed about?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I am answering your question.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: No, you are not.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I went to cabinet —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: You are giving a parrot answer.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: — and cabinet decided that upwards of \$45 000 would be the top figure that we could pay with the \$114 million that we have.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I will ask another question then: have you ever taken any other matters back to cabinet asking for more money to implement a program after the initial decision was taken by cabinet? Have you ever done that?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: We have a process that we go through Treasury when we want money. We go through Treasury. We go through the EERC and we go through the proper process. That is what you do when you are a cabinet minister—you go through proper processes to see if you can get extra money or money for programs that you need.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Minister, you have done that with other programs but you have just not done it with Redress then?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I think that you are putting words in my mouth that are not there.

Hon ALISON XAMON: It is a question.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Because you are not giving a straight answer, minister

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I always give a straight answer. I have gone to cabinet with the Redress scheme. I have sat down. We went through the proper process, which I might add the Labor Party did not go through the proper process—did not go through the proper process—and led people to believe they could get upwards of \$80 000 when they could not; it was an impossibility. The guidelines were not signed off when I took over. I had to do that. I had to change the guidelines. I think, given that it has never been done in this state before, the staff at Redress have done a very decent, professional job —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Who said they did not?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Nobody said they did not. But I am saying that they are doing —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: There was an implication in your comments then, minister.

Hon ALISON XAMON: No-one is criticising the staff.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: No-one has attacked the staff. I do not think you will find a comment attacking the staff from anyone. I do not know why you need to make those comments.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: That is good.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: On current modelling, is it still anticipated that most recipients will receive between \$5 000 and \$13 000?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Five thousand dollars, \$13 000, \$28 000 and \$45 000. I will hand over to Ms Withers.

Ms Withers: On current modelling the first-level payment of \$5 000 and the second-level payment of \$13 000 will be the majority of the payments.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: What is the greatest payment made to date?

Ms Withers: We have paid out the top-level payment of \$45 000.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Are you able to give us a breakdown in each of those categories how many payments you have made?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Redress has finalised 1 013 applications as of 14 July 2010. Out of that, 569 payments have been made, 659 have accepted, and 837 offers have been sent. The value of payments made and offers made is the sum of \$14 million as of 14 July. There have been 622 applicants who have submitted medical certificates qualifying them for priority processing, which is one of my highest priorities, and Redress's as well. There are currently 96 applicants in the priority category being processed, with 10 to 15 new qualifying medical certificates being received each week. The current finalisation rate is sufficient, if it can be sustained, to finish the scheme in mid-2011. As I said before, over the past four weeks Redress has hit its processing target for the finalisation of cases which includes offers, cases deemed ineligible, applications withdrawn and applicants being uncontactable after extensive effort.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Now can we have the answer to my question?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Now we have found the appropriate information.

Ms Withers: Our figures change weekly, obviously, and also our sample of people we have paid is probably aberrant as we are paying the oldest and sickest first. As of 9 July, 12 per cent of the payments were moderate, which is the \$5 000; 44 were serious, which is the \$13 000; 16 per cent were severe, which is the \$28 000; and 12 were very severe, which is the \$45 000 payment.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The minister may have given the answer to this question in relation to the outstanding applications for those with terminal illnesses or life-threatening illnesses. How many of those are still outstanding?

Ms Withers: That changes. We have got about 96 currently but we are getting 10 or 15 medical certificates a week. It is a moving target.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Ten or 15 a week of people who are in life-threatening or terminal circumstances?

Ms Withers: Yes; or whose health is very fragile. Over 700 people we have paid have been people with medical certificates. We are really trying to prioritise those who are in fragile health. We are never going to get ahead. We have to try to keep up.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Are you able to tell us how many people have died before payments have been made and therefore their estates received \$5 000? I think an estate can only receive \$5 000, is that correct?

Ms Withers: Yes. One hundred and seventeen people have died since the scheme commenced. You would be aware that the minister brought in the \$5 000 eligibility payment late last year for people who passed away before we were able to pay them. Of those, 44 had either received a final payment—so some of them got a reasonable amount—an interim payment of more than \$5 000, or have been deemed ineligible. We are currently working with 48 deceased applicants to verify eligibility. Twenty-five people have been given eligibility payments. One of our issues is that some of the people actually died quite a long time ago. We have actually got to find the families and talk to them about the money. In light of that, I think our clear-up rate is pretty respectable.

The CHAIR: Anything more on Redress?

Hon ALISON XAMON: I do not have anything more on Redress. Hon Ken Travers may want to. I am moving on from Redress.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am just reading the email. I might come back after I have finished reading the email.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I refer to the sixth dot point on page 719 which is about the Women's Advisory Council. Can the minister please provide some detail on how it is envisaged the work of the Women's Advisory Council will improve the economic security of women in WA, and has any funding been allocated in anticipation of initiatives which may be proposed by the council?

The CHAIR: Has everyone got where that point is on page 719? Hon Alison Xamon might want to repeat the question.

Hon ALISON XAMON: It is two parts. I will ask the first part again. Could the minister please provide some detail on how it is envisaged the work of the Women's Advisory Council will improve the economic security of women in WA?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I have a very active Women's Advisory Council. Its chairperson is Maria Saraceni, who is a lawyer.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Who I am very familiar with.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I have 13 women on that council. They all belong to other women's groups. Some belong to Zonta, some belong to the National Council of Women and some belong to the CWA group. They all have their groups to go back to. They meet every two months. They have been extremely active. We had a symposium for women recently, in the last month. That symposium attracted over 200 Western Australian women. The focus of that was on economic security.

Hon ALISON XAMON: It was a very expensive symposium. I know a lot of women involved in NGOs who were disappointed that they felt it had been priced out of their reach.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I looked at that and I took that on board. But then I looked at what the WACOSS conference was and that was over \$700. Ours certainly was not near that expensive. We did have women that could come along at no cost. We certainly did not lock anybody out. That was not what we did. We were very inclusive and got as many women who wanted to come, that phoned up, to come. It was an excellent conference. From that conference, they put forward a lot of recommendations. The Women's Advisory Council go through those recommendations and then report to me on those recommendations. I will have a look at their suggestions and see which ones we can take on board.

Hon ALISON XAMON: You said just then that WAC has been looking at the issue of economic security for women. Are you able to outline any of the initiatives or what has actually been suggested or recommended to improve the economic security of women in WA?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No; that will come from the Women's Advisory Council. We have just had the symposium. The Women's Advisory Council will take the recommendations from the symposium back to their council. Then they will come to me with those recommendations.

[10.15 am]

Hon ALISON XAMON: Do you have a time frame for when you are expecting that those will be forthcoming?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I am expecting that they will be forthcoming within the next few months—those recommendations that they are working on.

Hon ALISON XAMON: So, has any funding been allocated in anticipation of any of the initiatives which might be proposed by the Women's Advisory Council?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No. WAC—the Women's Advisory Council—has its own budget.

Hon ALISON XAMON: But is that for the operation of the actual council, rather than initiatives which may arise as a result of the council?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: That is for the operation of the council, but in conjunction with myself and the council, we will look at what we can progress. I do not have a crystal ball in front of me and I cannot say what that will be. I will sit down with the advisory council and we will look those proposals, and the next council meeting is in August.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I just want to know if I am incorrect on this, please do correct me. You do not have any money in this budget for this financial year for any potential initiatives that may arise from the advisory council. Potentially any initiatives would have to go into the following financial year; is that correct or am I wrong?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I will hand over to Eddie Bartnik.

Mr Bartnik: The Women's Advisory Council have got their own operational budget which gives them a bit of room to take on particular projects. It is modest.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Can I ask how much that is, please?

Mr Bartnik: It is about \$80 000.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Eighty thousand?

Mr Bartnik: Yes, and that is for operational support and their meetings. Also the department has staff and other operational resources that can be directed to priorities that come from the advisory council. So, for some of the work to be done, it can either be done through non-government or academic organisations or it could be prepared through the staff of the department. The department also has got various grant programs where community groups could make applications for modest amounts of money to progress particular projects. And if there were particular larger projects, then the department would typically look to partner with other organisations to try to support and fund those projects.

Hon ALISON XAMON: So, it is a bit of a waiting game at the moment. We do not know what they are going to initiate and when they do we have no idea where the money might come from.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: That is why you have a Women's Advisory Council. You have a Women's Advisory Council so that they can go back to their communities; come back to me; we have had the symposium; there were recommendations made at that symposium; the council will meet in August; and then they will come back to me and we will have discussions. That is how it works. What do you want; a crystal ball so I can see in front of me? Well, I cannot.

Hon ALISON XAMON: No. There were departments that actually dealt with this.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: There are 13 diverse women out there who belong to the council.

Hon ALISON XAMON: So, what support is the advisory council getting from the Office for Women's Interests?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It gets a lot of support. It gets administrative support, but I will hand over to Eddie Bartnik.

Mr Bartnik: It has a level of executive officer support to support the council in their operations and various projects. It also has the broader support of the staff of the department in terms of priorities that the advisory council wish to progress.

Hon ALISON XAMON: What is the FTE in the Office for Women's Interests at the moment in terms of staffing?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I will hand over to Margaret Dawkins.

Ms Dawkins: Currently we have a director of women's interests. We have three senior policy officers and an exec officer that is supporting the Women's Advisory Council in our policy team.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Can I ask are those policy officers full time?

Ms Dawkins: Yes.

Hon ALISON XAMON: They are, so it is effectively five FTE from what you are describing?

Ms Dawkins: This is in the policy component of the department. Obviously, we have many divisions and we have staff working in our funding area administering the women's grants as well. So, whilst there are more generic funding staffing personnel, they are working on women's interest issues. Similarly, we have staff in our public relations communications team who work with policy staff on supporting women's initiatives. So, we are spread in many places.

Hon ALISON XAMON: And how does this compare to previous years; is it more or less or the same FTE?

Ms Dawkins: Do you mean prior to the formation of the Department for Communities?

Hon ALISON XAMON: So, in dealing with women's interests?

Ms Dawkins: I do not have the exact sort of FTE comparison prior to the formation of the department. It would be probably comparable if you counted up the staff working in all the different divisions, plus the policy staff, would be a comparable number.

Hon ALISON XAMON: So, what is the primary focus of the office at the moment? You mentioned grants.

Ms Dawkins: As in the policy direction?

Hon ALISON XAMON: Yes.

Ms Dawkins: We have been working with the minister, obviously, on developing new sort of strategic directions for women's interests. I think we have agreed that the formation of the new WAC is going to really influence the policy direction for the team. I guess we have been waiting for WAC to really get on board. It has been sort of fully operational since about February. So this symposium has actually been a really significant event for us and we intend taking the recommendations from WAC to really develop our forthcoming strategic and operational plans over the next couple of years. So it is actually quite a critical symposium for us. We have had a lot of work. The minister has been the minister responsible for minco—the ministerial council for women—for the past year and that has been a significant role for the minister and we have done a lot of support for her in that regard. And some of the other work that we have done, we have a service delivery arm—I am sorry, I failed to mention that—which is our women's information service and we have produced a women's services directory which was launched at the WAC symposium the other day. So that is a compendium that was an initiative of the minister. She came in very strongly saying she would like to have that resource developed and in the hands of women's

organisations across the state. So that has just been released. So, WAC is a significant guide for our policy direction for the coming year.

Hon ALISON XAMON: It still sounds as though it is like a bit of a wait and see, because it sounds like it is still being developed. We really do not know what is likely to come out in terms of policy direction.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: We have to go to the public to see what policy directions they want to take as well. I mean, I cannot ignore the women of Western Australia and I certainly have not.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Minister, I would never suggest that, but it has been two years.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No, and I certainly —

The CHAIR: No, I think it has been. Can I just clarify: WAC was formed in February 2010?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes, it was.

Hon ALISON XAMON: But it has been two years since. I mean, we need to progress women's issues within the Department for Communities. So, I think it is fair and reasonable to expect that we would start seeing some clear direction in terms of what is intended for women and women's service delivery in the state.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Yes, because they were so well looked after by the last government, weren't they? Come on. Let us move on.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I am hearing that we are still a way to go.

The CHAIR: I do not think we need to be cross-political here.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: Yes, because I would like to ask some questions about the Women's Advisory Council, having been a member of it in 1992-93; so it does have a very, very long history, the Women's Advisory Council—I know Maria Saraceni—and I think it is a very worthwhile organisation. But in regard to that dot point and the lack of retirement savings women have, there is enormous literature and research as to why that is the case. The Department of Commerce's own website is talking about gender pay equity—an issue that has been talked about for well over 20 years—says quite clearly why it is. It is because the work traditionally done by women has not been valued and rewarded. So, notwithstanding what the Women's Advisory Council—this current one—is going to advise, what exactly is being done in regard to what we know is the reason why women do not have retirement savings and do not have superannuation currently, as opposed to —

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: We are doing exactly what the Labor government did, the previous government. And I make that point not to be political. I make that point to say that this has always been the case, as you pointed out. It does not make it right. And what I want the Women's Advisory Council to do is to perhaps come up with some recommendations so that I can make my little dent in that as well, because we do have to be keeping that at the forefront. And that is part of what the Women's Advisory Council will do, and it is part of my role to have a look at that as well.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: But with respect to the Women's Advisory Council, having been on it, these are volunteers doing this and they will bring a whole lot of ideas and experience. We have got the hard evidence, we have got the research, and so as a department, apart from the Women's Advisory Council's input which is fabulous, that is not what is going to move this forward. And whilst I take your point that this has been a long time; I admit that. I have been writing, talking and thinking about these issues myself for many, many years as many other people have. Where are we today? What is being done in a concrete manner to address this within the department over and above waiting on what WAC has got to say?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I will hand you over to Margaret Dawkins.

Ms Dawkins: I guess we do have a close relationship with the pay equity unit in the Department of Commerce, and recognise their leadership in that issue, so it is a collaborative arrangement. We

have had some symposiums trying to influence thinking in the area across different government departments in the private sector. We have done some joint work with Curtin University in that regard. It certainly is on the minco agenda as an all-of-Australia issue and so all of us, I guess, across the country are contributing to it. We try to increase understanding by production of our women's report card, which makes it blatantly clear that there is inequity in wages, and distribute that as widely as we can and update it as frequently as we can. We use the women's information service to get the information out to women who need to appreciate that they have rights and that there are ways that they can individually —

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: Why are we not making progress then? I mean, you are the ones who have carriage of this. I am not saying it is an easy issue, but why are we not making progress? I mean, report cards talking about it—what are you doing or where do you see that something concrete can be done?

Ms Dawkins: It is almost a systemic issue, is it not?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It is a systemic issue, and I think what Margaret said is quite correct—we have to keep these issues at the forefront and I do think that at some stage there will be a generational change, a rollover, and we will see that the younger generation coming up will be more demanding; there will be more of those women. And, I guess, you ask why? I have that same dilemma myself, and I think for those women who choose to have children and drop out of the workforce, then when they come back into the workforce, a lot of times—and I just heard it on the radio this morning and it made me very cross—the women go back to their positions, their positions are not there, their career path has stopped the minute that they left work and had their children, and we see again today that pregnant women are treated like lepers at work.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: Is the department, for example, advocating that women who are, say, doing the traditional caring jobs—I do not know—caring assistants, child care or anything like that—should be paid the same or is the department pushing within government that they should be paid the same as someone who has done a six-week forklift course and who, despite perhaps having less training, is going to be paid a lot more? I am looking for—actually, have you got a strategy to push this forward?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I think I am just one person and one minister, and if you are asking me: do I let it drop? No, I do not. I am always talking about putting women on boards, having more women doing things, making men and women equal. Equity issues—I am forever putting that in front of a cabinet. I am one person. The Treasury works on pay equity. I do not. But I think we all need to, all women need to keep it out there at the forefront. But, you know, it has always amazed me that carers who do 24-hour caring for people probably get paid absolutely nothing, and when you think they do the most important job in the world. And you and I know that. We know that women are the main carers and that the pay discrepancy is just not there. But I mean, governments, federal and state, grapple with this all the time.

[10.30 am]

Hon ALISON XAMON: I can pass my questions on to my colleague Hon Lynn MacLaren. A lot of it, to be honest, is around youth issues, but we are not discussing that today.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Can I just pass you over to Mr Bartnik?

Mr Bartnik: I just have an additional comment about some work that is occurring in the community services area, which I think has got a large proportion of women working in some of those roles. Through the new Economic Audit Committee process, the partnership forum, there is a very strong dialogue, particularly initiated by the community sector, around the pay rates for workers in that sector. Just to let the committee know that the partnership forum, which is the combination of state directors general and key people from the non-government sector, is working

very collaboratively to address that issue and to come up with the solution. I think that is an indirect response to your question, but I think it is a tangible, practical thing that the department is doing.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: So if the Australian Services Union case, which I gather will start shortly before Fair Work Australia, is successful, do I take it then that the government will match that increase for the payment of people that it outsources to NGOs?

Hon ALISON XAMON: As has been done in Queensland.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: We will just have to wait and see when something comes down. When that decision is made, that is when discussions will start.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: But that would be a tangible way, would it not, of talking about why women have less savings because of the rate of pay they are getting in that sector, which is predominantly female?

The CHAIR: Can I just pick up on this same issue, because at the bottom of that same page 719, the last dot point is the new state and community volunteering strategy 2010–14 being developed by the department. I suspect that this is not too dissimilar to what the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, is talking about in getting a whole volunteering movement going in the United Kingdom, which is going to operate at community levels. Yet I hear there is almost a conflict of interest because volunteers, which I know we rely upon excessively, as the minister has already outlined, to do this important work in the communities, do not get paid. Most of them are most likely to be women. So in one sense we are talking about pay being higher for these people and the other way we are talking about, maybe not here, but one of the possibilities under a volunteering strategy is that we have a lot of people who are doing all this crucial work in our communities but who are not going to be paid. Where are you going on this area, or is this a strategy yet to be developed? I think it is still to be developed.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: People volunteer because they want to. It is something that people do in our community and they do not expect payment for it. It is their community service, if you like. Western Australia has the highest rate of volunteers of any other state. I often say that the state would cease if we did not have volunteers.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: And unpaid mothers.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes. You just brought up a very good point. It is the mums and dads who do a lot of the sporting in country areas—all volunteers. It is all to make their little community a better place. If we did not have those volunteers making our community a better place, Western Australia would be the worse for it. But we do have a volunteer strategy and we have just released it to the people of Western Australia to see whether we can improve on volunteering. There is a series of questions that they can answer and send back to us. I will just hand you over to Marg, who I think is doing the volunteer strategy.

Ms Dawkins: I think the preliminary to the question was a comment that more women were volunteering than men. In fact, the stats are almost identical in gender breakdown, so it is not the domain of women alone when you consider sporting volunteering and emergency services volunteering —

The CHAIR: Yes; okay. Beyond that into the sporting area, I can understand.

Ms Dawkins: There is an enormous diversity of ways you can volunteer both formally and informally.

The CHAIR: I was actually focusing more on the needy areas, but fair enough. In the broader context, I understand.

Ms Dawkins: The whole concept is that volunteering is about capacity building rather than a cheap labour source; it is really about the way we engage with our community and do our social responsibility. It builds strong communities; it is not just how we get jobs done. Your question was

specifically about this strategy. We actually have a draft that was developed collaboratively with Volunteering WA and with our volunteer resource centres that we fund across the state. We have developed some draft goals and some sub-goals and we have gone out to consult. We have done three consultations—south west, north west and metro. We are in the sort of submission phase. People are going through the strategies: Does this resonate with them? Is this really where they want to see volunteering going? The idea is that what comes out of this whole product is that this will be a jointly owned strategy. This is the community, government, local government, and state government. Volunteering is not controlled or owned by one sector. We will have an action plan coming out of it where all those different sectors can send in. We are going to have this giant action plan that can be populated by all the different sectors that use volunteers. It will just get bigger and bigger and we will see all the different actions that are contributing to our state volunteering plan.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: I do commend the work on the action plan. It sounds very collaborative and worthwhile. I have not seen the detail of it. I do have it on my desk but I have not actually got to read it all.

Ms Dawkins: This is the draft strategy, not the action plan.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Definitely working with the NGO peak body is a great way forward. I just wanted to get a further detail on the volunteer resource centres and the funding for them. Obviously, they play a very important role, as we would all know, in the community. Is the funding being increased to the volunteer resource centres? I understand there are 16 currently. Does that represent less or more than in previous years? Do we have a plan to increase that? I would like to hear about the direction of volunteer resource centres.

Mr Bartnik: We currently fund 15 volunteer resource centres from the state perspective, as well as Volunteering WA as their peak organisation. Interestingly, the commonwealth government also funds some of the same organisations through their volunteer management program. While there has not been a net increase in the operating expenses, there has been indexation from both sources. As part of the process of the consultations around the new strategy, we have actually proactively engaged the commonwealth government, as well as working with the local state government peak, to try to think about whether we can get better value for the combined investment and also to prevent some organisations receiving two lots of funds sometimes for things that are quite similar with two lots of reporting and those sorts of things. We think we can actually generate some better value from the current resource, as well as hopefully expand that resource as part of the strategy.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: So for each volunteer resource centre, the funding has increased only by the indexation rate?

Mr Bartnik: Yes.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Are there any plans to have more volunteer resource centres? Volunteering is obviously a growing sector. Are you going to increase the number of volunteer resource centres?

Mr Bartnik: The current picture with respect to volunteer resource centres across the state is quite patchy. In fact, there are some very big gaps, particularly in the northern parts of the state. Part of our collaboration with the commonwealth was to say, “We’re doing this. You’re doing that. There are some big holes here” and to work together to rationalise what we currently do, but also to plug some of those holes. One of the consultations was in the Kimberley; it does not have a volunteer resource centre. We have particularly engaged the commonwealth and local organisations about that issue. We will also be linking in with the Department of Regional Development and Lands and the regional development commissions, who are profiling their community resource centres as hubs for local community activity. Our aim would be to get more comprehensive coverage of volunteer support across the state.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: That would be your aim. But in this budget there is nothing set aside but potentially in future budgets you may?

Mr Bartnik: Yes.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Finally, volunteering of course is traditionally done by seniors. There are a lot of seniors who have had the time and energy to invest in volunteering. Obviously, with the cost of living it is more difficult, particularly for people on a fixed income and seniors. Are we finding that there are less volunteers in the last, say, 12 months because it is harder to get to a volunteering centre, or is it just more difficult to make ends meet and therefore there is less capacity to volunteer?

Mr Bartnik: If I could just make a general comment, then I will pass over to Marg. I think the data we have is that there has been no decrease based on the formal records. Mara Basanovic from Volunteering WA has actually commented publicly just recently that there has been an increase in younger people volunteering, which I thought was very, very interesting because you hear a lot of bad press about younger people being problems. In fact, there is quite a resurgence of interest in young people volunteering and contributing.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: If I can just further add, the seniors transport in off-peak hours is a real help to them.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Are there similar programs for younger volunteers where they are assisted with their transport costs getting to a volunteering task?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No. I just think that with younger volunteers, it is probably their community service. That is what they do, like I did when I was younger and like you did when you were younger. That is your community service. That is what you do.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Older people do it as well.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: They get the free public transport.

Mr Bartnik: If I can just add, I think the way it tends to work is that the host organisations that host the volunteers are generally the ones that are responsible for recruiting and supporting. I am involved with a sporting club. There are some additional reimbursements of some of the junior coaches for some of their expenses and those sorts of things. I think it is up to each organisation that is actually hosting the volunteers as part of their structure. I know they cannot pay people necessarily, but in terms of some of the incidentals and travel costs and training and things like that, organisations are generally pretty good, I think.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: So the department would fund that if an organisation requested that?

Ms Dawkins: I can make a comment. One of the goals in this draft strategy is highlighting that volunteering is not a cost-free exercise. Volunteers need to be recompensed for out-of-pocket expenses, and that is part of good management of volunteers.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: But for some volunteers, they are happy to do that; that is part of their contribution.

Ms Dawkins: Some of them are, but it needs to be offered as part of coming to volunteer with an organisation. It is not something that the Department for Communities does a top-up to organisations to provide transport expenses. But for the organisations that we fund who use volunteers, that is part of good volunteer management that you quarantine some of your budget to meet those volunteer expenses. For the broader volunteers engaged by other agencies, we can only say these are the principles that you should be following when you engage volunteers; otherwise, we may well see a depletion of them if their field is getting too expensive.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I think it was a good point raised by Hon Lynn MacLaren in regard to young people, because increasingly I have heard in recent years that for many young people

volunteering is almost necessary on their CV, as is doing various internships and other things. That obviously is a real cost, and some young people and their families can pick the cost up. Given that it has moved from being something that you would encourage and think was worthwhile doing to something that is important to prove you have done, I wonder if you are giving some consideration to those young people who basically would not be able to get to volunteer and would not be able to have that, as much as they might want to do it. In the context that I am asking, it actually now counts for something; it is not just out of the goodness of your heart. I do not want to be too cynical. It is something that people look at. I wonder if you are thinking about that issue.

[10.45 am]

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I know that schools now do it as part of the older year 11 course.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The requirement was cut out as part of your three percentage efficiency dividend, but do not let that worry you, minister.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I thought that in country areas, they still had units that they could do, but if the member is saying that I am wrong, then I will —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am pretty sure that one of the issues that was cut out was the 20 per cent requirement.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I am not aware of that, but I will take that on board and check that out. What the member is saying is quite true; there was a cost to me when my children were growing up, and —

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: For example, at the YAC Youth Awards last Friday night, much was made of these kids who set up organisations, volunteer to do this, very much that they should be recognised for it, but that is really not going to be within the scope or ability of a lot of kids to be able to do that. I say this as much by way of comment as something that, if we are going to recognise it, then keep in mind that it will be a problem for some kids.

Ms Dawkins: I will comment that we fund the Y Volunteer? program through Volunteering WA, which is youth-oriented and embraces the importance of volunteering for young people's CVs and future careers, as well as for their sense of satisfaction. That Y Volunteer? program has been doing a lot of work through UWA, and Curtin Volunteers! is already a really reputable and active university volunteer organisation.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I suppose I mean more like out at Ellenbrook, for 15 and 16-year-olds who would not otherwise be able to volunteer; something like that. That is where I am pointing it towards.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: On volunteering, I notice that recently one of the major banks has been advertising with regard to volunteering. There is a program through that bank where it is releasing people to go out two days a month, or something like that, to do volunteering activities. I have not seen the draft strategy, so I do not know what is in it, but I am wondering whether there has been any thought given to extending something like that to our public sector, where our public servants could be doing that as part of a recognised function of their work. I know that the problem is that there are not enough people who are volunteering. Is that part of the draft strategy?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Certainly in businesses in the South West, especially in fire season or in ambulance duty, according to each business, they actually do that and there is no pay cut or anything like that, but if there is a fire, they just go. I am thinking of something like a mill; they will do that, and it is up to individual businesses, but I will ask Marg or Karin if there has ever been anything like that done in the public service.

Ms Dawkins: To answer the first part of the question—whether the draft strategy embraces what we call employee volunteering—yes, it does. We have a goal that is around employee engagement in volunteering supported within the government and private sector.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: So within the government sector?

Ms Dawkins: Yes. Some time ago we did actually produce quite a significant resource called “Employee Volunteering”, which was a series of case studies and principles to assist employers in making the decision on how to release employees, and the considerations like health and safety, workers’ compensation, and all those kinds of complexities that they would need to consider. That is a resource that still sits within the department. Recently—I think it was mid-2009—one of our volunteering policy staff did a sort of audit, I guess, of all the different government sector agencies that are currently using employee volunteering programs. I do not have the final count with me, but she trawled through the whole public sector and certainly found a number of them that were embracing public sector employee volunteering.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Would you be able to provide us with that information? That would be interesting to see, because I would have thought that if we could get people from the public sector engaged in volunteering with NGOs, it is another way of supporting the NGOs rather than trying to prop them up with money all the time, instead of giving them some bodies who may have the time, in the public sector, if they are not doing something else that day, they could be usefully used in an NGO. It would be good to have a look at that.

The CHAIR: That is information on government people who are involved in volunteering.

Ms Dawkins: So it is a survey.

[Supplementary Information No A2.]

The CHAIR: How much money has been budgeted for the volunteering strategy, or the implementation of the volunteering strategy, or this volunteering project that you have? What is the budget?

Ms Dawkins: As I said, it is not going to be a strategy with actions, necessarily, that are out of the main context of what we, as a policy office, would be doing anyway, so it is a compilation of actions that we, other government agencies, the sector, will do; it has not got its own budget for implementation, but certainly there is a budget for the development of the draft strategy in the consultation process, but it is more bringing everything that has been done together in a place that can give some profile to volunteering.

The CHAIR: So the 16 volunteer resource centres —

Ms Dawkins: They all have their own separate funded budget, which is ongoing.

The CHAIR: So what is the aggregate budget of that service, roughly?

Mr Bartnik: If I could answer that question? The average funding level for the volunteer resource services is approximately \$28 000 each. When combined with the funding for the Statewide Volunteer Centre of Western Australia, it is a total state funding of approximately \$875 000.

The CHAIR: Have you considered co-locating that service with, for example, the community resource centres in the regional areas?

Ms Dawkins: I had a meeting with Deborah Rice at the Department of Regional Development and Lands the other day to explore how that development was going and to ascertain the nature of what they see the community resource centres as operating; what sort of model they see. There were some synergies there that I could see and we have agreed to explore possibilities of some co-location, or community resource centres taking on some of the features of a volunteer resource centre process.

The CHAIR: Relatively small amounts, but it is nice to see that you are thinking of the costs. The minister made some reference to suggest that there is quite a lot of information about the number of volunteers, not just in the state but in the country. You said that we are the highest volunteering state of the country. You must have information on the breakdown between the proportion of

volunteering which occurs in the regional areas of the state as defined, however you define it, versus the city areas. While you are thinking of that, how do you get the information for this? It would be quite tricky, I think.

Ms Dawkins: The most reliable source that we use is the ABS voluntary work survey, which is done probably every three or four years, and there are key parts of the census also that are related to volunteering involvement.

The CHAIR: I am just trying to remember if I have ever filled one of these out, because I do not think I have ever seen one.

Ms Dawkins: The member has never done a census?

The CHAIR: I have done a census, but I do not recall a question on volunteering.

Ms Dawkins: Actually, in the last census they increased the number of volunteering questions by one or two, from memory; that may be incorrect.

The CHAIR: I suspect that everyone, almost, would say yes to that, though, because everyone volunteers a little bit.

Ms Dawkins: Some people do not see what they are doing as volunteering; they just see it as what they are doing as a community member.

The CHAIR: So they are understating their own contributions.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I have been involved in the local footy club for 40 years, but I am not a volunteer.

Ms Dawkins: Absolutely. That is why we always say that volunteering stats are under-reported, because people do not identify what they are doing, especially in what we call informal volunteering, which is not necessarily engaged with an organisation, but just doing their bit. These are the regional and metropolitan statistics, with the dollars attached. Metropolitan is 77 per cent.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: In regional, we have got 23 per cent, and Perth metro, 77 per cent. We have got 49 per cent of those are men, and 51 per cent are women.

The CHAIR: That was not really the question I was asking. I was asking the percentage of the population. In the regions, you are going to have a smaller population; I suspect that the proportion of regional volunteering is enormous in terms of the percentage, but if the measurement is, as we have discussed, pretty rubbery, I suspect —

Ms Dawkins: No, those stats do exist. I do not have them with me. They actually do it for each metro and region —

The CHAIR: Could we get those stats, please? I would be interested in the population proportion of volunteers in regional Western Australia as defined versus metropolitan Western Australia as defined. I do not know if you have the answer to this question, but I have always been interested in how much that contribution is to GDP if it was valued, especially divided by regional Western Australia as well as metropolitan.

Ms Dawkins: We actually commissioned a research report on the economic value of volunteering to the Western Australian economy and I will just have to find that report.

The CHAIR: Do you have it there?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I think, from memory, it is \$6 billion.

The CHAIR: We can ask it as a supplementary question, if you like. That is just the value of volunteering in GDP terms, if you like.

Ms Dawkins: It may not be broken down into regional and metro, it may just be to the Western Australian economy in total—the economic value. But I can certainly get the stats of what proportion and we can apply it to that.

The CHAIR: I suspect you have got the stats; you would have to be able to break it down by location.

Ms Dawkins: Just to illuminate, the deputy chair will be happy to know that the stats will show that the country areas are a much higher rate of volunteering.

The CHAIR: I am sure that is the case! Why do you think I would be happy about that? When you have your voluntary resource centres, the question I was actually going to have is how you measure the success of those voluntary resource centres. In answering that question, can I just ask how many people are involved, how many FTEs, what are the resources being given to these resource centres to actually deliver?

Ms Dawkins: Is the question within the Department for Communities, or how much are we funding for in the centre?

The CHAIR: Who pays for the FTEs in the voluntary resource centres?

Ms Dawkins: We fund the organisation the amount that has been indicated, \$28 000 per centre, and then they choose how they fund their coordinator out of that funding. Most of them are partnerships with other organisations, so we have telecentres as partners, we have local governments as partners, or NGOs, so that is not obviously the total funding for the centre, so once you put the total funding pool together, they then employ a coordinator for as many hours a week as suits the size of the centre and the nature of the locality. So they would employ it at sort of award rates.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: If you are looking at success, Mandurah has just had its fifteenth birthday and it has got Mayor Creevey down there, who is very supportive of the volunteer centre. They have got a brilliant coordinator of the volunteer centre. It is probably up to 16 years now, but to have had its fifteenth birthday, and they have documented all the way through and produced a booklet on it; they are very successful. These centres are very successful and they become a real hive of activity for people. For some people, that is their reason for getting up in the morning, to go to the volunteer centres to see what they can do, and it gets back to many of the seniors use the volunteer centre, but it is for everybody, and the beauty of them is people can go in and say, “I want to do something, but I’ve got no idea,” so there are hundreds of things that volunteers can do, so they match as to where that person would be best fitted to.

[11.00 am]

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I would like to talk about page 719, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, and the second dot point —

Research evidence confirms the critical importance of early childhood experiences in lifelong outcomes.

I have quite a few questions I would like to ask in regard to this area. I would just preface my question. There have been three recent reports done in Western Australia—“Invest Now or Pay Later”, “Healthy Child – Healthy State”, and the inquiry into the adequacy of the services to meet currently the needs of children, all of which made findings that they believed that children are not getting the priority they should and that things are actually getting worse for children and for society because of that—socially and financially. My first question is in regard to the call that was made by Professor Fiona Stanley of the Telethon institution and Michelle Scott, the Commissioner for Children and Young People in a letter that was sent to all members of Parliament on 7 April 2010, asking for the establishment of an early years commission or an office of early childhood. I am asking, in regard to the research that you note there, what are your views on that; or what, if anything, is being considered within the department?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Within the Department for Communities, it is a virtual office of early childhood. We have the parenting services, which we have rebadged to Parenting WA. We have some excellent services out there for children. When you are talking about the state of Western Australia, it is a very vast state and no one community is the same when it comes to what they do within that community. They are all very different. I am not being overtly political here; I am just saying the facts. When the federal government first mooted that they would have a very large influence in early childhood they actually had to go to about four drafts, because what they were missing was that they wanted to sit two-year-olds on chairs and actually teach them history. That might sound very silly to all of us here, but that is what the inference was in these documents that are coming out. No, Hon Ken Travers, I have not got a draft document.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I just like the term “inference”.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No; myself and Liz Constable would not accept that draft document, and neither did the commonwealth, so it did go to another draft. Because children should be children; children learn through play; children should be allowed to learn through play. But having said that, I will hand over to the director, who can tell you a little bit more.

Mr Bartnik: If I can just say, I think this is an extremely complex area. We have got the commonwealth government that are directly involved in two separate government departments, FACSIA, and DEWR, which are involved in a range of issues but also the accreditation of childcare facilities. At the state level we have the Department for Communities, particularly through childcare licensing and parenting. We have the Department of Health, through child–maternal health services and the child development centres. We have got the Department of Education. Then at another layer we have disability services and child protection. So we have actually got a lot of players in the one space. We have also got a requirement now for one national quality system. So from the commonwealth perspective there are moves to have one regulation system and one system of standards across the country. Just to say that the major government departments at the state level have been working together to look at how lead responsibility can be best organised. At the end of the day it is a policy decision for the government because it does cut across between three and five government departments. I think the role of public servants is to put the data in front of the government and develop the options. I think the Premier has indicated that there will be a decision coming at some point about the best arrangements.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: Could I go from that and say that given the answer you have given me, would you—I am asking the minister now—agree with what the letter of 7 April from Fiona Stanley and Michelle Scott said, that services are very fragmented? With respect, I think your answer to me suggested that they are. Is that something that you would agree with?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I get back to each community having their own services. Fragmented? Yes, they are fragmented, but they are because we are such a vast state. For me, when we are looking at early childhood, we are looking as much at parenting skills as the little ones. So it is important for little ones to go to playgroup, just as it is important for mums and dads to be a playgroup. Within each community, there are many, many events that socialise parents and children. They are fragmented, but I do not think fragmentation is such a bad thing, because each community has its own way. In each community there are services for parents and children. In our vast state, do they expect us to have one service in every community that matches, say, a city service and a country service? Do they expect us to have uniformity throughout Western Australia? I do not know. I just see that there are differences, that each child in Western Australia—certainly, if you are asking me: does each child in Western Australia deserve the best, I would say yes, and I think the government is trying to work out the way for how we can do that but not have uniformity.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: Can I put it another way, then. Given the three reports that I have referred to, I think amongst the evidence in that is that we have a large group of children arriving at school without the level of skills and the pre-literacy skills that we would normally have expected and

social development. Even today in the newspaper there was a comment by Anne Gisborne about a group of children whose behaviour is so difficult that she is suggesting that it is time perhaps to look at a different place to place those three to eight year olds. The tenor of these reports is that we are facing more problems amongst a wider range of children coming into schools. We know, and this is what the research says, the early years, the first three years, Fiona Stanley and Michelle Scott say, and this is from their letter, that it is well accepted that the critical time for positive intervention in a child's development is between zero and eight years. I suppose I am putting it to you again: given that currently the responsibilities are spread between communities, education and health, the proposition that is being put by them and by Trevor Parry, is that to get a policy and then to ensure it is properly funded would require a policy centre within an agency with its own minister. So I am asking again: is that a part that the government is currently considering?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I do not see that the answer is a simple one, given that it does cross a lot of portfolios. But, having said that, that does not mean that the government is not working on a policy direction, we certainly are. We are certainly sitting down with the commonwealth. We have put more money—this week actually—into things like speech therapy, because we all know that the early years are just so critical. They really are. You say zero to eight; zero to five is probably more so. In any literature that I have read they are the absolutely critical years. It is no good having speech therapy 18 months out, because, as we know, you do not pick up these problems until a child is nearly two, because it is not starting to speak until then, and then another 18 months out puts that at three and a half or four, starting school. So they are behind the eight ball. The government recognises that. I recognise that. We are trying to find a way that is suitable so that all children in Western Australia will get the early years critical intervention that they need.

The CHAIR: This is going to be a very interesting area. I am sorry I did not stop before it got onto this area, but I think we should have just a few minutes break and a cup of tea and so on.

Proceedings suspended from 11.10 to 11.20 am

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I would just like to continue to talk about this plea, really, that has been made by Fiona Stanley, Michelle Scott and also Trevor Parry who has recently been awarded a Citizen of the Year Award and also wrote to all members of Parliament on 20 May recommending an office of early childhood to ensure—I am quoting now—“The coordination of services with sufficient and sustainable funding allocation to guarantee effective service delivery.” I suppose my last question on that is: why, minister, are we not taking the advice of these experts? Fiona Stanley is a world leader. We have a Commissioner for Children and Young People, we have people like Trevor Parry and we have an enormous weight of evidence now. In practice, we are seeing that children, as I mentioned earlier, with less literacy preparation, verbal skills and social development. Why would we not take this advice from these experts?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: My comment to that is we have always had experts, even when your government was there. Fiona Stanley was there as well. Firstly, I make that point. If I can just go back to what I said to you before, that I did not think it was a bad thing that services were fragmented. I put it in the terms of community. The fragmentation that I was talking about was health, education, child protection and community services. I did say that it was not easy, and it certainly is not easy. If you look at health, there are pregnant women and you have pregnant maternal health. Then you have a baby and it is still maternal health. Then it could turn into child protection. We have an agreement between child protection and King Edward. That is one synergy. Then you have education. Formal education is from three and a half upwards. Formal education is what I am talking about; of course, it is all education as soon as you have a baby, but I am talking about formal education. Community services: we have 40 000 children in child care. It has taken me a long time to get that up and running properly. We are probably the first state in Australia that has breaches online. All those children in child care—we have the strictest regulations of any state now. What I am trying to say is it is not easy to just go “zoom—we will put it altogether”, because your

government never went “zoom—we will put it altogether” either. We have always known that zero to five, the early years and prevention in those early years, is critical, and we have always had the same experts that you are talking about now. They have always been there. Nothing has changed. What we are doing—I will hand you over to our director general—is we are trying to get a more coordinated response.

Mr Bartnik: There are various mechanisms where the state government departments do work together. The minister has already mentioned some of the issues around child safety. In the early childhood area, there is a senior officers’ committee of senior staff from all the key government departments. They meet to put together the state’s strategy. Particularly at the moment with the COAG reforms around early childhood, the state does need to have one lead policy agency and one lead regulator because particularly the regulation, which was done partly by the commonwealth and by a variety of state government arms, all need to be brought into one single system. In some ways, I think we are seeing the state-based efforts to collaborate with and bring things together, mirrored by the need for a clear point of negotiation with the commonwealth. So we have got mechanisms in place at the moment. I think people generally agree that there is room for improvement. Can I also say that I am not aware of anywhere in the world that has a perfect early childhood system. There are different views about what an integrated system means because you can have integrated policies but on the ground the services do not work together. You can also have different departments but well-integrated services on the ground. It is easy to have one office and one system, but having all the levels of policy, funding and integrated support on the ground is actually quite a difficult thing to do.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: Are you exploring the options there?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: If I can answer that, I went to South Australia and looked at place called Café Enfield, and it was on a school site but away from the general school area. It did have community health, maternal health, social workers, day care, long day care and a place for mothers to sit and chat. Certainly that makes a lot of sense. You would have heard me on many occasions talk about having those services in one place. That, I think, is the path that I would like to go down. Some of these sites do not necessarily have to be on a school site; you can have different options. I have released a paper about integrated services. Some of them may have child health services, long day care and social workers, but not necessarily be on a school site because there might be communities that do not want that. Each community could be different but it certainly is a path to look forward to, and I have started going down that path.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I was actually going to ask about the integrated services discussion paper. Are you saying that there is a report that has come from that integrated discussion services paper?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No, there has not been a report that has come from it. We have put it out there for comment. If I can hand over to —

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I have some details in front of me. It said on your website that feedback was extended to 8 June. I assume that was 2009. What has happened since then?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No, I just said that I would hand over to explain that.

Mr Bartnik: What has happened is we have had feedback from various state and community organisations about the concept paper. Like in most parts of early childhood, there was agreement about some aspects but not others. I think what has happened is that the agenda has become married with the national quality agenda, which has brought a national quality system and national early learning framework. The challenge for the state at the moment is around partnering with the commonwealth around the national reforms but also the best state-based arrangements for policy leadership and regulation that have us as part of the national system but also produces integrated services on the ground.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: So is there nothing publicly available following you getting the feedback from that discussion paper in mid last year?

Mr Bartnik: We have not released a formal follow-up report.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: So you got feedback but that is not available?

Mr Bartnik: Yes.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I have only a couple of other questions. One of them is in regard to a report called “Early Childhood Development in Western Australia: Capturing the Potential” by Brenton Wright. Is that report going to be tabled?

Mr Bartnik: If I can comment. As far as I am aware, that report was commissioned by the Minister for Education. That is not a report to our department. We were consulted as part of the process but certainly the report does belong to the Minister for Education.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: It would seem very relevant to what we are talking about to me and reflects the fragmentation.

My last question then is in regard to the early years. My own experience was over a relatively short period dealing in an area where there were very difficult cases that the Department for Communities would have to deal with. Some people speak about them in terms of being an identifiable 100 or 200 families where there are such levels of dysfunction and problems, and obviously the effect that has on children. Does the department have within it the development of a specific policy identifying and trying slightly more lateral different things on that very hard basket of families? My perception is that perhaps the young women have their children rather young and have rather a lot of children so the increase in the numbers is exponential. Is that an identified group that has specific policy work being done on it, or specific targeting?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I guess we can get back to fragmentation. With my hat as Minister for Child Protection, which probably that question would need to be directed to; it is not really specifically to communities, although we do have the Best Start program. That is a good, practical approach. We also have Best Beginnings and Strong Families, but you might like to ask that in the next session.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I ask it only because it overlaps education, health, education, communities and child protection.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: And that is when I got back to you by saying that it was not easy because they do all overlap. Some of these families overlap in more than four services; there are about seven or eight of them. It is very, very difficult, but when you put Strong Families in and parental responsibility orders, which is in the next session, perhaps I can talk about that then.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: So within communities you do not have a particular policy person looking at what seems to be an identifiable particular group of families?

Mr Bartnik: If I can just add, when you think about the early childhood space, communities is positioned as universal service; that is, child care, parenting, play groups et cetera. As people require more specialised assistance—it might be around disability, a child protection issue or a health issue—is when the next layer of the targeted services come in. In some ways, our job is to try to provide accessible, inclusive child care, parenting and general family support, and we work very closely with a range of other organisations. Foetal alcohol syndrome might be one example of particular parts of the state where there is a particular issue. The minister may wish to speak about our role in that area to do with publications and resources, but then the specialist intervention role is something that would be carried out by —

[11.30 am]

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: We have spoken about that in the past. Again for me that is an issue because we know the number of young people presenting in the youth criminal justice system and the numbers affected by foetal alcohol syndrome, as Catherine Crawford, a magistrate in the north west, has talked about. I suppose I am trying to express my concern that it is fragmented. I noticed that it was reported in the newspaper on the seventeenth that the Minister for Health, Kim Hames, is considering an agency to address the early childhood years. I refer to an article by Cathy O'Leary in which she referred to the concerns of Fiona Stanley and Michelle Scott. Can the minister make any comments in that regard?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I cannot comment for Dr Hames.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: I follow up the line of questioning started by Hon Linda Savage. I refer to the work that the department is doing to develop the social wellbeing indicators, which can look at this complex information about fragmentation and program development and how effective it is and whether it is working. One of the WACOSS budget asks was to develop a set of social wellbeing indicators. I note that the department already has four of them working to assess how well people are doing in different areas. A couple of them relate to women; one relates to Indigenous women. One relates to wellbeing indicators for children and youth. Can you advise when the reviews of these data sets, which already exist in the Department for Communities, are due to be completed and the scale of other work in this area? Social wellbeing is, of course, well supported at the federal level by the social inclusion strategy. I am interested to know how we are doing as a state, whether we are updating our indicator sets, when those updates are due and whether there are any other ways in which we are working with the federal strategy and social inclusion to develop these indicators.

Ms Dawkins: We are updating the children and youth indicator sets as we speak. We are developing them in a series of topic-related areas. We will have different fact sheets on each one of the different indicators to increase their accessibility and usability to other organisations. The active-ageing indicator set is currently being updated. Both of these should be released in several months. The women's report card was recently updated. It was reissued last year. The Indigenous women's indicator set was also recently updated. Two are nearly there.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: By the end of the year?

Ms Dawkins: Yes. In terms of the broader social wellbeing indicators, I know that it was WACOSS' interest that we develop those. We have not discussed such a role for the department with the minister. We are certainly interested in seeing how we can bring the four sets of indicators together to provide a more comprehensive compendium of indicators covering our communities portfolio. I cannot talk beyond that.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Are you aware of any particular regional areas that have a lower social wellbeing as indicated by the indicators you have?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Some suburbs are on lower indicator levels. I do not like pointing out communities —

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: No, you do not have to.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: — but certainly whether it is to do with early childhood, seniors or whatever there are communities that show up.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Are you using these indicators in your program development?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes, we are. One that we are using is the age-friendly cities, which the member knows about, and giving local government money to increase their awareness of what they are doing in the community and to see if they can come up with a better way of being age-friendly. There are many, many things the department can do and we are looking at those indicators.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: How are you working with the federal government strategy?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: There is no federal government at the moment. However, when there was —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: There is still a federal government; it is just in caretaker mode. Do not panic; do not create alarm!

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: There is always one in every crowd!

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Quite a bit of effort went into social inclusion. It highlighted areas in Western Australia and I wonder how they are working with the Department for Communities.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I have a good relationship with Jenny Macklin and FHCSIA. We work well together. I hand over to the director to answer that.

Mr Bartnik: There are two comments to make. Firstly, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet has been the state lead on the national working group around the social inclusion strategy. That is being reviewed at the moment. We have put forward our department taking that lead. We think it is appropriate for us. Secondly, there is a group of policy directors across the human service agencies who meet. Through our policy area and Margaret's role we have taken a lead role in mapping the social inclusion national framework to a variety of state-based planning frameworks. It is quite complicated in terms of state planning and state development. We are quite well advanced in mapping that out and pulling out the key synergies and through the various director generals we are starting to pull that together into a more coherent framework at a state level that makes sense to us.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Can the state access the resources that the federal government has put into this? Does the state have access to the information that the federal government has gleaned for social wellbeing indicators and is that information accessible to the department at no cost to the department? Is there any intention to use it?

Ms Dawkins: Certainly the social wellbeing indicators that the social inclusion board and the office within the federal government have put together have been studied in some detail and have been an important resource in developing the social policy draft framework that Eddie referred to. As Eddie said, there are many different players in this sphere. We have done a scan to see who is doing what and what information there is to inform the development of this.

The one area I forgot to mention was the important mapping work that we have done in the early childhood and children's services area in terms of the indicators. That is certainly used in service planning within the children and family services division. We would like to take our other indicators into the geographical distribution of those indicators. That is quite a lot of work and we are pacing that over time as resources allow.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: When will the social data maps be complete? In 12 months?

Ms Dawkins: We could manage it in 12 months for active ageing and women's, but I am not comfortable to say that for all different indicator sets, because it is really accessing regional data for each of those indicators, which is not always available.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Having some experience in this area I know that it is a bit under-resourced. What resources are you putting into to put together all that complex data?

Ms Dawkins: The department has a research manager and a research officer. The research officer is highly skilled in this mapping exercise. It is her role to do the children and family services indicator. She is now dedicated to the other indicator developments.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: So one staffer?

Ms Dawkins: Yes.

Mr Bartnik: Can I just add that we are one of a number of partners involved with various projects at the Telethon Institute. There is a developmental pathways project which is an across-government project that has some national funding. That will be a collaborative effort across government. The

Australian Early Development Index involves a serious effort in local communities and across the state to use the data in local areas to target areas that require development. The Department for Communities staff are very much involved both at the statewide level and locally.

The CHAIR: The minister knows my interest in revolutionising this area. I have talked to her a bit about the funder-provider service delivery model. The minister mentioned the words “local government”. When you talk about communities, how do you judge the depth of knowledge of local communities between what you can do in a way semi-centralised operating from Perth as distinct from the community, which knows its problems and can, if it has the right catalyst, develop a solution from which it could draw on different providers? As the minister said before, each community is different; no one community is the same. Therefore, who understands the differences most relevant to the community and, around that, who is trying to see how we can best implement something to make a difference, which has not been made in most societies for the past 200 years?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I was a local government councillor for six years. When I go into a community I always like to visit the CEO. The councillors are an important part of a community. The councillors are democratically elected and they know their community and know it well. Local government is very important.

The CHAIR: Sure. The point I am really making is the accountability for the problems that are in our communities. Who best understands the nuances of the problems in communities? Is it a centralised structure like we have now or is it the whole devolution down to local government where they understand it? I accept that they are not equipped just yet, but the local governments know their communities best. If they know their communities best, who is best to develop the solutions for their communities?

[11.45 am]

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I have already said, about age-friendly cities, that we give the money to local governments to work out what age-friendly services are best for their communities. I guess my answer is that it is the community, with its democratically elected councillors, that knows the community best. I like the department’s model of going out to consult with communities to find out what it is that they want in the community to make whatever problem that they have disappear—or at least make it more manageable.

Mr Bartnik: One of the key themes of the Economic Audit Committee report was around a greater focus on the needs of citizens and local communities. One of the particular areas the department will be working in is—I think they were called—service hubs or integrated service delivery points. I am fresh from a meeting yesterday about that particular topic. It seems to me that that process is heading to using the wisdom and knowledge of local people about the needs of local communities, but adding to that a process that can provide good benchmark information about that community and other communities, and also information about service models and other ideas. Sometimes, if you ask local people what they need and what they want, people will ask for what they know. In my experience, particularly in the disability sector, when people are exposed to different service models and different ideas they can be very creative in finding local responses to meet their needs. For me, I think it is a combination of local wisdom and knowledge, and the needs that fit the community. But departments like Communities have a role to provide benchmarking and information, and also information about service models and different ways of doing things that local communities can take on board and think about what makes sense to their local community.

The CHAIR: I understand what you are saying. My issue is not just about the needs, it is about the accountability. It is about who is best to be accountable for the community. That is one of the issues. You spoke about benchmarking. I agree that it is a very important part of it. Has the department, in the past couple of years, done any benchmarking of any community to see whether the work it is doing is making a difference?

Mr Bartnik: Perhaps, the best example I could give—well, there are a couple of examples. The main one would be the age-friendly cities framework benchmarks local areas against international benchmarks on key indicators. So you can get a sense of what is happening in the local community compared with a much broader population, and I think that brings a sense of relativity to that local community. Also, I think I mentioned previously the Australian Early Development Index. It is not perfect, but it does provide a measure of how kids in a community compare with those in other communities. People are very serious about using that to inform our practice and improvement.

The CHAIR: That may be one of the better benchmarks as we go along, but I suspect that we could do much more on a micro scale with our benchmarking, if we are putting money into our communities. I mean, you have a big budget. The interesting thing is that I do not think that many of us, if any of us, know whether we are achieving what we wish to achieve or whether we are making a difference to where we want to try to get to—which, in my view, is mostly reducing family dysfunction. I am interested in your point about benchmarking and your point about the early age index, but I suspect that we can go much further.

Mr Bartnik: If I can just add one thing: the thinking through the Economic Audit Committee about some of the local service hubs is very interesting because it is looking at not just co-locating services, but also having some points of responsibility for coming up with a solution across government departments. If it can take that thinking and turn it into action, there will be a much stronger sense of local accountability. But with local accountability comes local decision-making. The resources would need to be provided in a way that is a bit more flexible so that you could respond to the needs and make decisions, and then you are accountable.

The CHAIR: Which comes back to that funding provider – service delivery model. That is interesting. Thank you.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I note that you announced yesterday that you have commenced the cost-of-living rebate payments for seniors for the 2010–11 financial year and that there has been an indexation increase. Can you tell us on what basis the 4.8 per cent was arrived at?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: The 4.8 per cent arrived at is the CPI times two. Because the first payment was made in March and the second payment was made in July, in another financial period, we included CPI. When we first brought it out, it was \$100 and \$150; now it is \$104.80 and \$157.22. It was to compensate for the delay in 2010. The CPI calculation includes 2.25 per cent for the financial year 2009–10 and 2.5 per cent for the financial year 2010–11.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Did you say that it was compensation for the delay?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: There was a three-month delay. We did say that we would pay it in every year, and we paid one at the end of March and we paid one in July.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Will seniors ever get a payment for the 2009–10 financial year?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: We said that we would pay it every year; we did not stipulate that it would be every financial year. So once a year, we will pay the cost of living —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: So seniors will not ever get a payment for the 2009–10 financial year.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: As I have said, we will pay it once a year; we never said we would pay it once a financial year. Every year that we are in government —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I heard what you said, but I am asking will seniors ever get a payment for the 2009–10 financial year?

The CHAIR: Hold on, Hon Ken Travers.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: And I provided the answer that once a year —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: You provided an answer; not the answer.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: — seniors would get the cost-of-living rebate, which they have done. They were paid last year in March and they were paid this year in July.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Has your department done any modelling of the actual impact on seniors of the government fees and charges in the budget?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: That would be with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet; it does a lot of modelling.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: But in terms of determining this payment for this year, did you do any modelling to determine the actual cost increases on seniors as a result of government fees and charges?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: When we came to the election, we said that we would pay a cost-of-living rebate; no other government has ever done that. We said that we would pay \$100 for singles and \$150 for couples, and this year it is \$104.80 and \$157.22. We had a base to start with, we said that we would pay CPI, and that is what we have done. That was our election commitment.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: That is fine, minister, but I am asking you: have you done any modelling? It is a simple answer—yes or no. You do not seem to be able to do that today, but it is a simple answer—yes or no. Has your department done any modelling to determine what the cost impact on seniors is of the government's increases in fees and charges?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I said to you when we started that it was an election commitment and so —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: No, no, minister. I am not asking you with respect to your payments on the cost of living, I am asking you a very simple question: have you done any modelling—yes or no? It is a very simple question. I am not asking for the political rhetoric; I am asking for a simple answer. Has your department done any modelling?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Are you asking about modelling on this cost-of-living rebate or are you asking if we have done any modelling on what the costs are overall for seniors?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am asking about the impact of government fees and charges on seniors.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I will hand you over to the director.

Mr Bartnik: The department has not done that directly; that would have been done by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. And I imagine groups like WACOSS would also be taking a perspective on that.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I meet with WACOSS every month or so.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Have you received any feedback from seniors groups about the impact of government fees and charges increases on their cost of living—as a department, as the office for seniors' agency? Have you received any feedback?

Mr Bartnik: The department has various calls come in probably to the Seniors Card Centre and also correspondence typically addressed to the minister or to the government around the rebate that the department drafts responses for.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Does the agency have an advocacy role on behalf of seniors within government? Is that one of its roles?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes, it would be. The seniors centre does a very good job of advocating and letting seniors know what rebates they are entitled to—of which there are many. They can get a security rebate. They can get free travel. There are over 500 discounts in the seniors' booklet. Also, they ring up and ask when their payments will go into the bank. The seniors centre is run by volunteers and FTEs, and they do an absolutely brilliant job. A lot of seniors will ring the

seniors centre if they want to know what rebates they can get, or just what help they can get within the community.

The CHAIR: Do you have any further information on that question, Mr Bartnik?

Mr Bartnik: Just to add that the department routinely provides comment on cabinet submissions from other government departments. So there is that scrutiny of the proposals being prepared and the impact of them.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: In terms of the cost-of-living rebate, did the department put up the figure of 4.8 per cent or was that determined by Treasury? Was it your department's request or was it a Treasury edict as to what the increase would be?

Mr Bartnik: It was the Treasury standard appropriation of indexation.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Right; but did the department seek anything different from that?

Mr Bartnik: In fact, the department took the decision to provide two years, whereas, technically, that was not a decision that the minister needed to take. I think the minister took the position of two years indexation and a tiny bit more to make that 4.8 per cent.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: No, no. I understand what you have done; I am asking how you arrived at that decision. Did the department put forward the request for 4.8 per cent, rather than Treasury indicate that that would be what it would be? I am trying to work out the order in which it was done. Did you formally request the increase or did Treasury say this is what you can pay?

Mr Bartnik: It is a standard indexation response across all-of-government programs, which was applied to this particular initiative as it was to all of our other programs.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Yes, I understand that, but I am asking: did you ask for it or were you just told by Treasury that that is how it would occur?

Mr Bartnik: I understand that it has been whole-of-government policy to provide indexation, so we have a number of out years' estimates. It is a part of the standard operating framework and so we had an expectation that we would receive that.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: My final question about the cost-of-living rebate—and I note that you provided a lot of good stats earlier in the hearing—is: do you know, in terms of the percentage of seniors who are eligible for the rebate, what percentage has taken up and applied for the rebate?

Mr Bartnik: The figure that I have is that 80.2 per cent of Seniors Card holders applied for the 2008 payment.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: That is Seniors Card holders, but do you know how many seniors who have not applied for a Seniors Card would be eligible for the payment? Have you done any work to identify how many people in our community might be eligible? My next question is going to be: are there any demographic groups showing up as not having applied for Seniors Cards or for this payment?

Mr Bartnik: I will do my best to start the response and then I will hand over the second part of the question to —

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: There is a review being done about eligibility criteria —

The CHAIR: Mr Bartnik.

Mr Bartnik: It is quite a complicated picture because we have one figure for the number of people aged 60 years and over and of those a smaller percentage are eligible for the Seniors Card. Of those, only a certain proportion applies for the Seniors Card and of those only 80.2 per cent apply for the rebate. I am trying to simplify something which is actually quite a complicated picture. In terms of any particular groups, if I could direct that question to Ms Dawkins.

[12.00 noon]

Ms Dawkins: We do find that regional seniors are not necessarily as well represented in the statistics. In terms of accessing business discounts, we do not have quite as many business discounts as we would hope in the country areas. The issue of a monopoly in a small country town—why would you be offering large discounts on your new services when you are the only one of those in the town? We have done some work over the years to increase our take-up rate amongst CALD seniors—seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds—to try to spread information through ethnic media groups. We are aware that there is a lesser take-up rate amongst ethnic seniors probably to do with lack of awareness that this entitlement is there. In the Indigenous community, we are aware that we have an issue that not terribly many older Indigenous people reach the age of entitlement to a Seniors Card.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Those that do, do we know what their take-up rate is?

Ms Dawkins: No. Karin, you can probably support me and comment on this one. At this stage we do not have a mandated field on the application requiring them to indicate whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. The data is patchy. It is a voluntary field that they may choose to fill in or not.

The CHAIR: Ms MacArthur, do you have anything you want to say?

Dr MacArthur: Just to confirm what Margaret is saying, that we cannot draw any definitive conclusions from the data that we have.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: Do you record postcode then?

Ms Dawkins: We do. We can do a lot of sorting on postcode. If there was a particular interest, we can. I can give you breakdown if you wish.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Just on the Seniors Card, was not a review of the eligibility criteria conducted?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes, there was. We have done a review. Once again, there was a review done in 2003. The Labor government did a review. They did in 2006 as well. We used those reviews. We had 141 people respond to our review. It certainly was not in this budget. I will be taking it to the midyear budget to see how we go then. It is quite complex. It is not easy. Because of the costings, it is a complex issue.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: The seniors rebates, are they all means tested? Are there any that are provided regardless of whether they are eligible for a Seniors Card?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: To be eligible for a Seniors Card you have to be 60 years of age and work 20 hours or less a week. Then you can apply and get the money.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: There is no income test?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No; not on the Seniors Card.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: My concern about it is that people who are most in need of rebates may not have the wherewithal to apply for them and people who are quite savvy about systems are able to access these rebates. One concern that has been mentioned to me is somebody with a luxury flat in Mandurah gets a security grille easily whereas other people who may not be so savvy about systems might be missing out. I wondered if there were any proactive strategies to address potential inequity in the delivery of these rebates.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: The stats do not show that. The stats show that 240 000 people have applied for the seniors rebate. The stats show that we have spent \$773 000 on the seniors rebate. Seniors are —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: But what you cannot tell us, minister, and your staff, just to confirm that, is whether there are pockets of seniors who are missing out. Yes, it has been taken up —

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I was just about to say, before I was rudely interrupted, that yes, there are pockets of seniors that we do not know if they are missing out or not. We do not know whether they are poor or whatever. I think you are being a bit—anyway, I will leave that.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: I am wondering if there are any strategies to try to identify the pockets of seniors who are missing out. If you are not collecting data from the people who claim for these about their income, it is hard to know where the rebates are going and whether they are actually getting to the people who are most in need.

Mr Bartnik: I will make a couple of comments. I think we are trying to be very proactive in terms of communication, particularly through all the seniors and other publications. There is a volunteer speakers' program. It is a fabulous program. We have a group of volunteer speakers who go out. We were there yesterday. One of these speakers showed us his schedule. He is out all over the place talking to groups, not quite every day of the week, but proactively out in the community. Also, one of the things I have been trying to do is one particular group might be older people with disabilities who, through the nature of their communication or other issues, might have difficulties. We have had a series of meetings with the Disability Services Commission about the whole range of things that the department does. As part of that there is the Redress scheme, the seniors rebate, all those sorts of things have been things that we have been working through to make sure that people are not disadvantaged through their disability or lack of communication. There may be more we can do but we are certainly trying very hard.

Ms Dawkins: I could probably add one more comment to that. Certainly when the cost of living rebate was being scoped out we had meetings with the Public Trustee and the Office of the Public Advocate about seniors who might be vulnerable and not be able to act necessarily on their own behalf to put themselves forward. We had fantastic cooperation from these two offices to make sure some of those more vulnerable seniors—and the Disability Services Commission—are getting their applications in and are getting paid the cost of living rebate.

The CHAIR: I am afraid we have gone a bit over time. It is a very broad area, as we have seen. We need to bring it to a close.

The committee will forward any additional questions it has in writing to the minister in the next couple of days together with the transcript of evidence which includes the questions you have taken on notice. If members have unasked questions, I ask them to submit these to the committee clerk at the close of this hearing. Responses to these questions will be requested within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. Should the agency 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 date may not be able to be met. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your time and your attendance.

Hearing concluded at 12.07 pm