

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

***BUDGET STATEMENTS***

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
MONDAY, 29 JUNE 2009**

**SESSION THREE**

**Members**

**Hon Giz Watson (Chair)  
Hon Philip Gardiner (Deputy Chair)  
Hon Liz Behjat  
Hon Ken Travers  
Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich**

---

**Hearing commenced at 3.51 pm**

**PEACOCK, MR MALCOLM**  
Clerk of the Legislative Council,  
Parliament House,  
Perth 6000, examined:

**LAKE, MR NIGEL**  
Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Council,  
Parliament House,  
Perth 6000, examined:

**GRANT, MR PAUL**  
Clerk Assistant (Committees),  
Legislative Council Committee Office,  
18-32 Parliament Place,  
West Perth 6005, examined:

**BREMNER, MR RUSSELL**  
Executive Manager Parliamentary Services,  
Parliamentary Services Department,  
Parliament House,  
Perth 6000, examined:

**HUNTER, MR ROBERT**  
Deputy Executive Manager Parliamentary Services,  
Parliamentary Services Department,  
Parliament House,  
Perth 6000, examined:

**TIMMERMAN, MRS DAWN GLENDA**  
Chief Finance Officer,  
Parliamentary Services Department,  
Parliament House,  
Perth 6000, examined:

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for attending this afternoon. I am sorry to keep you waiting. On behalf of the committee, I welcome you to this meeting.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

**The CHAIR:** Will you please state the capacity in which you appear before the committee.

**Mr Grant:** I am the Clerk Assistant, Committees, of the Legislative Council.

**Mr Lake:** I am the Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Council.

**Mr Peacock:** I am the Clerk of the Legislative Council.

**Mr Bremner:** I am the Executive Manager, Parliamentary Services.

**Mrs Timmerman:** I am the Finance Manager for the Legislative Council and Parliamentary Services.

**Mr Hunter:** I am the Deputy Executive Manager.

**The CHAIR:** You will have signed the 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 hearing. Please be aware of the microphones and try and speak directly into them. 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 or media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that premature publication or disclosure of the uncorrected transcript may constitute contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

Members, we have had a few sessions this afternoon so I do not need to repeat the need to refer to budget line items and what have you. But if there is a specific reference, please let us know before asking a question.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Are you subject to the three per cent efficiency dividend? If so, where are we achieving it?

**Mr Peacock:** No, we are not obliged to forgo the three per cent. There was agreement that the Parliament should be excluded from that process because we are not a government agency.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** It is interesting, because the Auditor General has just been in here, and he is subject to the three per cent efficiency dividend. I would not have thought the Auditor General was a government agency. Are you aware whether that is a written policy or is it an agreement with the Treasurer?

**Mr Peacock:** That was an agreement with the Treasurer.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is good. Have you got any significant issues and trends that will add to the cost of running the Parliament over the next 12 months?

**Mr Peacock:** From the Legislative Council’s point of view, probably not. We have put up various budgets for new items and, obviously, under the current situation, those items have not been funded at this stage. The implementation of an electronic records document management system is probably the only major project for this financial year.

**Mr Bremner:** From a PSD point of view, we are aware of some additional cost pressures that will come to bear in the 2009-10 financial year, probably in the order of \$300 000, for which we are not currently funded, so we are having to cost our 2009-10 budget to take into account those issues.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** What are they?

**Mr Bremner:** A range of things, from cost increases for IT services such as Internet and licensing. We had an unfunded \$65 000 increase in our lease commitment for level 2, 11 Harvest Terrace, where our finance and IT units are located. We have a very heavy anticipated expenditure in faults in the Parliament House building, a lot of which is directly attributable to the lack of ongoing maintenance. We are aware of a \$33 000 increase in FBT relating to parking. We are also aware of

an anticipated \$25 000 unfunded increase in the employer contribution for staff covered by Gold State superannuation.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** What about the parking levy; has that been factored into your budget? You will be paying an increase in the parking levy, I assume.

**Mr Bremner:** The parking bays at Parliament House are exempt. We pay FBT, but that was part of the \$25 000 in FBT.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Who pays for the ones along Harvest Terrace?

**Mr Bremner:** The Perth City Council.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** They will be happy with the Parliament making them pay more to provide free parking to parliamentarians! Do we not pay any parking levy at all?

**Mr Bremner:** No.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I take it the amount authorised by other statutes in the budget for the Salaries and Allowances Act 1975 is to cover the salaries of members of Parliament. Is that correct? That includes the Clerk's salaries of course!

[4.00 pm]

**Mr Peacock:** The Clerk, Deputy Clerk and members of Parliament.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** In light of the Treasurer's statement that the government does not want to see an increase in salaries for members of Parliament this financial year, can you explain why there is a budgeted amount for an increase in salaries for members of Parliament?

**Mr Peacock:** Obviously, these figures were put together back in October-November. That is one reason. I might just say with regard to salaries that the Clerk's salary and the Deputy Clerk's salary have been frozen for the next 12 months. That was a decision handed down earlier this year—in April. We would expect also that the members' salaries would remain the same. But as I say, those figures were based on October estimates.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** What was the percentage increase that you based those figures on?

**Mr Peacock:** Four per cent.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is above the government's stated wages policy. Why was it four per cent when the government's wages policy for the next financial year is 2.5 per cent? Can you also give me the figures for the out years as well?

**Mr Peacock:** I was about to go back to question two. The August 2008 determination by the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal provided for a 4.2 per cent increase, so I guess that is where we came up with an average of four per cent based on the previous year. The 2009-10 budget estimate increased by 8.7 per cent, which included a full year of expenses for the two additional members, and an estimated base increase of 4.5 per cent for remuneration and entitlements. That is all I can say on that.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I know that your recommendation went to the Treasurer in November, but the budget was cast in April—the actual date eludes me at the moment—and surely it would have been updated as of that date. Are these figures provided by you or are they developed by the Treasurer?

**Mrs Timmerman:** The figures that have been estimated here are based on those percentages. How it works with the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal appropriations is if an amount is appropriated beyond what is spent, that will be returned. So exactly what is paid to members is the amount that the council will get to keep. In the 2008-09 financial year we have actually returned some funds, because we estimated that there was going to be a surplus, so we have returned that to Treasury.

**Mr Peacock:** We only draw down exactly what is needed.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I understand that side of it, but I would have thought that, in terms of trying to maintain the accuracy of the budget, it would be cast around the state wages policy or any other policies of government. At the time the budget was actually cast, I would have thought the decision of the government to not support an increase in wages for MPs would have been known, and certainly the state wages policy would have been known. I am intrigued as to who makes that decision. Is it yourselves or is it Treasury that makes that decision as to what figure goes in here?

**Mr Peacock:** Well, we certainly sign off on a document. We signed off on the calculations by the Presiding Officer and the Clerk. As far as I know, we can get another opportunity to adjust those once the documents have been signed and sent off to Treasury.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Right. When you last appeared before us, you indicated that there were a number of occupational health and safety issues across the Parliament that needed to be addressed. Have those issues now been addressed and been funded?

**Mr Peacock:** Not funded, but certainly we have made considerable progress on those issues.

**Mr Hunter:** There has been some funding.

**Mr Peacock:** Rob Hunter would be the best person to advise you on how we are going with that.

**Mr Hunter:** A number of things have happened since the last time this committee met and asked that question. An occupational health and safety consultant under the common user contract has been employed—that is People Impact. They have been working with the Parliament for about eight months now. We are going through a complete framework to get a code of practice—which is the across-government code of practice—for occ health and safety. I keep saying occ health and safety, but it is occ safety and health now, of course. We are abiding by that framework. At the moment they are actively working with us for about 7.5 hours a week. The financial commitment that we have with them between the three departments—the third department is not here—is about \$36 000 so far. That is what we have committed to in terms of hours. We have bought hours with them until December. The purpose of them being on board is to provide advice to us about setting up our frameworks and our policies, and doing audits. A number of audits have taken place, and we are actively doing policy structure, procedures and checklists. That goes quite a long way.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I appreciate that. However, I understand from your evidence to us previously that there were some issues in the kitchen, for instance—it might have been the bain-maries—that have been a longstanding occupational safety and health issue. Has that issue now been addressed? I think there were a couple of other issues as well. I appreciate the work that you are doing on continuing to maintain a high standard, but are we actually doing the work that needs be done, and are we getting the funds to do that?

**Mr Bremner:** Building on the work on occupational safety and health that we are doing anyway, which has been explained, we actually had WorkSafe inspectors come in on two occasions, once for the catering facilities and once for the outside facilities—the gardens. They picked up several minor infringements, and all those areas have either been rectified or are in the process of being rectified. One of the areas they picked up where we were deficient—and for which we had to make quite a substantial capital funding allocation of \$100 000 in the budget, which was totally unanticipated—was in relation to emergency eye-wash facilities for gardeners when they are dealing with chemicals and petrol.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So have the past issues that were identified now all been addressed?

**Mr Bremner:** As far as I am aware they have, yes.

**The CHAIR:** How much is it going to cost to fix the leaks in the ceiling in the area between the kitchen and the ground floor where the buckets are? I just saw those!

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I thought the leaks were all up in the press gallery!

**The CHAIR:** I just noticed that—because you know what my former profession was—and I thought that is going to cost a bit!

**Mr Bremner:** From time to time, depending on the prevailing weather conditions, we do have some minor leaks around the Parliament. We address those leaks when we become aware of them. The amount of rain that we have had recently has meant that we have had some minor leaks, and they have been fixed.

**The CHAIR:** Not like the one that came down the corridor and we were ankle-deep in water! I digress. Sorry. Now to some serious questions.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** What are the key cost drivers for the Council?

**Mr Peacock:** It would have to be staffing. That makes up about 70 per cent of our budget. That would be the major one. I think the issue is that if you look at the budget, it is broken up into salaries and allowances, that being for the Clerks and members. The other amount is really the delivery of services. Out of that \$3 million, the majority is for staffing costs.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** It seems to me that the early Parliaments were very much paper-based. That has led to the system that continues pretty much today, but it has been overridden by technological advancements, if you like, and computerisation. In the past, someone might have drafted one question for the day, but it is now easy to draft multiple questions and put them into the system. How much of a challenge is that for the Council to deal with? Is the Council trying to adapt to those technological advancements, and how is that impacting on the whole system?

[4.10 pm]

**Mr Peacock:** I think we have. Certainly, for questions we have changed our rules. At one stage we used to check every question to make sure it conformed to standing orders, but due to the volume of questions it was just impractical to keep doing it. Now, in the main, we have allowed most questions to go through as they have been provided. We will check to some degree, but it is very minimal. That is just to meet the demand because, obviously, with parliamentary questions there is a short timeframe in which to process them and get them off to government so you can get an answer back reasonably quickly. Certainly, from that point of view we have made some changes to cope. Some of the other things that we are doing in regard to technology is we are building a product that is known in the Senate system as Dynamic Red. When we are sitting you will get your business program—that is a hard copy at the moment. What we are doing is developing that so it is an interactive one. When the house is sitting—let us say you are dealing with a notice of motion—you can click on the notice of motion and bring the text up. The same with a bill; you can bring up the bill, the supplementary notice papers, or the committee report. It is all in the one location. It is my hope that in the future, rather than members just getting a notebook and not using it for the sittings of the house, they do start to use it for that purpose. I see this product that we are developing at the moment as a first step towards that.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** As long as the notebooks do not crash!

**The CHAIR:** It is related, but it seems to me that one of the issues that I have had an ongoing issue with is waste reduction. It relates to paper and electronics.

**Mr Peacock:** Absolutely.

**The CHAIR:** In terms of the volume of paper that gets generated on any given day or week, what percentage of that actually gets recycled and is that an amount that is increasing or decreasing? You have the overall volume, and then how much of it actually gets recycled?

**Mr Peacock:** All of our paper gets recycled.

**The CHAIR:** If members put it in the right bin.

**Mr Peacock:** If they put it in the bin in Parliament House, it will be recycled. That is not to say that that is satisfactory. I have argued for a number of years, and some members would already know this, that if you go to local governments—I use the example of the City of Cockburn—they are all electronic now. They have not used a paper base in probably the last 12 or 14 years; so Parliament is way behind in how it utilises technology.

**The CHAIR:** So it could be an area for improvement, and it would be a cost saving as well, one would assume.

**Mr Peacock:** Absolutely. I am hoping that over the winter break we will have this business program complete for members to actually start having a look at. It is not just going to be for members; it is actually being put out onto the website, so you can physically view the proceedings—what is happening—and it will indicate on the business program at what point the house is actually dealing with that business. As I say, as you see the text on your current business program, you can click on each of those components and bring up the data that relates to that. That is how we think it will assist members, because all the information that you deal with in the house, for instance, will be in that one location.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Can I just ask a follow-on question, Madam Chair? It seems to me that older members, by and large, probably are not as computer literate, the young ones in particular are fantastic, and the people of my generation are somewhere in between.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am wondering where you are taking this, Ljil!

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Do you think that this is one of those things that will evolve over time, because clearly you still have to cater for the member who is not computer literate at all?

**Mr Peacock:** That is right, but how is that any different to local government? I would not have said the majority of local government councillors were young and yet all of them are using computer technology. The issue is not about using the technology per se, but it is like the business program—how do you make it intuitive enough so you do not actually need to know how to use the computer? And that is what we are trying to aim for.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** It is also about having a big enough screen in some cases.

**Mr Peacock:** It can be.

**The CHAIR:** I find it very difficult to scribble notes on my screen, but if you have paper copy, you tend to. But that is a technical thing.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Could I just refer us to page 65, and the efficiency indicators. I know they were introduced only since 2007-08. Can you just give us an idea about what those efficiency indicators have helped drive in terms of improved efficiency or reduced costs?

**Mr Peacock:** I will hand over to Russell because that is actually part of PSD.

**Mr Bremner:** The indicators provide a global figure for the apportionment of costs. They also obviously provide a year-upon-year comparison of those costs to tell whether we are providing services at an increasing cost or a decreasing cost. Because it is only the second year, we are still getting a handle on the accuracy and the composition of those figures, and we are working with the Office of the Auditor General in respect of that because of course these are audited. I think it is probably premature at this stage to point out exactly what benefits there have been, but I would be hopeful that we are not just collecting this information for the purpose of satisfying the need to have efficiency indicators; that they are actually going to be of some use to us.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** So far, Russell, have you found that what you have defined as those efficiency indicators seem to be stacking up reasonably well?

**Mr Bremner:** They seem to be. I would be in a better position to respond to that probably in two months' time when we are in the position of having done the 2008-09 outcomes and being able to measure those accurately, and then we would have our third year of comparisons.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I accept all that, but one thing which did strike me a little bit was that all your staff costs, I would presume, have overheads and the variability we add is almost a sitting day. Really, the interesting thing is not the average cost per sitting day, to my mind; it is the direct cost or the variable cost of that sitting day, which I guess adds up to the total in a year. If we are not being productive in the Parliament in the chamber—of course we always are—we will find that that overall cost for the Council will be increased. But I am just not too sure how material our unproductivity, if it was there, is, if you understand me. In other words, what is the cost per day if we do not do it as well as we might have done?

**The CHAIR:** On the day of a long filibuster, for example.

**Mr Peacock:** I would have said that we are actually not monitoring members' performance; we are monitoring the Parliament's.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I understand. It is like a lot of things: it is a package. I am just interested to know what the direct costs of sitting an extra day might be.

**Mr Bremner:** And that question has been asked before, I think, in this forum, possibly by members present here today.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Great minds do think alike from time to time!

**Mr Bremner:** We have endeavoured to give a costing for the difference between a non-sitting day and a sitting day cost, for instance, where it relates to staffing overheads, *Hansard* printing overheads, catering overheads and the whole range of PSD-type services. Probably if that question was asked of the Council, they would look at a number of other factors that come into play for them. Yes, it certainly is more expensive on a sitting day to run the Parliament, but I accept your previous comment and what you said.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I am really trying to extract the overheads from the direct costs, but we will look at it as it comes through.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I have a very simple question. If we were to go towards more family-friendly hours, would there be cost savings to the Council in terms of the penalties, for example, that you might have to pay staff beyond a certain hour?

[4.20 pm]

**Mr Peacock:** I will answer that question from the Council's point of view. There would be some savings, although I do not think that it would be a significant amount. Our overtime bill would not be much. We are not talking hundreds of thousands of dollars. It would be less than \$100 000.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** So it is not a great driver for it.

**Mr Peacock:** No.

**The CHAIR:** What about more generally for the running of the Parliament?

**Mr Bremner:** From a PSD perspective there would possibly be an increase in cost because the savings in overtime that we would make may well be offset by the additional staff that would be required when the two houses and possibly committees were sitting at the same time. A specific example of that is our reporting services area—the *Hansard* reporters. At the moment, the sitting times of the houses and the historic sitting of committees complement each other. If they all sat in a compressed period, perhaps for a longer sitting week or whatever other permutation, we would have to seriously look at whether we would need more full-time staff to carry out that role at those times, although it would be far easier to recruit staff to work those hours rather than the current sitting hours.



**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Following on from an earlier question, I am not sure whether I understand the cost of having the two houses sitting at separate times, as opposed to sitting together. How does that work? When we have a Council-only sitting week and then an Assembly-only sitting week, what does that do to the cost structure of Parliament, as opposed to having the two houses sitting on the same week?

**Mr Peacock:** From the Council's point of view there would be no difference because the staff are there to service the house. In PSD there would be an increase.

**Mr Bremner:** I suggest that we take that question on notice and come back to the committee after we have had a chance to look at the current figures.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** With the marginal costs that Hon Philip Gardiner was talking about, it puts another perspective on that.

I refer to "Outcome: The Legislative Council Members' requirements are met", and the "Average Member rating for procedural advice—house" on page 50. I am intrigued to see that there is a reduction in the estimated actual for this year. Have you identified why that would be? The same budget target is being set. I have been particularly happy with the procedural advice this year compared with past years! I am a bit confused.

**Mr Peacock:** Perhaps the member thinks we should raise the bar even higher! That was the 2008 actual, not the budgeted actual for 2008-09. I cannot give an answer to that other than, as Russell said previously, 2007-08 was the first time we had key performance indicators. It might well be that we have left them at that rate to see how things pan out over the next year or two.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** The Council achieved a rating of 90 per cent but the estimated actual for this year is back to 85 per cent. Is that based on a survey or is it the best guesstimate at the time the budget was put together?

**Mr Peacock:** At the time, we based it on a decision we made regarding key performance indicators. We had to find a target that was realistic to reach and we certainly met it in 2007-08; in fact, we increased it, which is terrific. We wanted to see how it went over the long term. That was only the first year. When these things are undertaken for the first time, there is a good response rate. We do not know whether we will get the same response rate in the future.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** In the out years you might get a response from the members who are grumpy with the performance.

**Mr Peacock:** As Russell said, obviously this year it will be affected because of the number of new members. I think 85 per cent is still a realistic target for us to try to achieve. It is about us trying to achieve these targets rather than necessarily trying to beat the score from the previous year.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I have a similar question on page 64 about the "Average Member rating of Information and Services". The rating has gone down from 96.3 per cent last financial year to an expected 90 per cent this year, and there is only a budgeted target of 90 per cent in the future years.

**Mr Bremner:** Once again, that was done purely on the basis that we did not have confidence in the sustainability of the rating that we had received previously, especially given that we have a new cohort of members in both chambers. In addition, my recollection of the audit advice is we were told to use the current numbers for a couple of years until we have sufficient data to more accurately extrapolate it.

**The CHAIR:** Is that largely based on the surveys that members fill out?

**Mr Bremner:** That is correct.

**The CHAIR:** Is it based only on that?

**Mr Bremner:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** What is the percentage of members who fill out those forms?

**Mr Bremner:** Mr Hunter could provide you with that information, given that all the surveys are out at the moment.

**Mr Hunter:** The Council response rate to the surveys was 21 members out of 35 members.

**The CHAIR:** That is roughly 60 per cent.

**Mr Hunter:** That is not too bad. We did it electronically this time. We were not disappointed with that response. The availability is part of the survey, but we also report by exception. When there is an IT outage and the wireless network is down, for example, that is reported by exception. Those types of things are put together with the survey results to give us the outcome, so it is not just the survey.

**The CHAIR:** Is the percentage of responses from the Assembly members similar to the response of Council members?

**Mr Hunter:** No, but the survey has not closed yet.

**The CHAIR:** What about in previous years?

**Mr Hunter:** The Council has generally had a higher response rate. I am sure you will like to hear that!

**The CHAIR:** What is the response rate in the Assembly?

**Mr Hunter:** It is still early days. Last year we had an overall response from 44 per cent of members.

**The CHAIR:** I am trying to gauge the accuracy of the survey. One of the things about surveys is that people who are unhappy tend to fill them out, although if they are really unhappy they do not fill them out either.

**Mr Hunter:** It is mixed, but it is quite good information.

**Mr Bremner:** Invariably, the inherent difficulty with surveys is the response rate. At this time of the year especially, I can only speculate on how many surveys from all manner of government departments go to members' in-trays for completion. To a certain extent we are competing in that market. The Auditor General has made comments in the past about surveys being used for performance indicators and also about the response rates. My understanding is that unless there is a 70 per cent response rate, the accuracy of the survey could be questioned. We will possibly never get that type of response rate. When we get the results of the 2008-09 survey, we will discuss with the Office of Auditor General whether the survey can be modified to satisfy the Auditor General's requirements and to provide us with more meaningful data.

**The CHAIR:** Just as a suggestion, it might be useful to make a footnote of the percentage of returns.

**Mr Bremner:** That is reported in our annual report but not in the budget papers.

**Mr Peacock:** In 2007-08 the Council had a response rate of 53 per cent. There were 18 respondents.

[4.30 pm]

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** As a new member still trying to wade through what PSD does and what DPC does, I ask with regard to the level of dissatisfaction with information and services, does that generally come about as being outages in equipment or the sorts of softwares that are made available to members, and also perhaps not having access to things like Sky News in the house? Everyone has got that in their house these days, but we do not have it in our house.

**Mr Bremner:** Just in the way of a general comment, unless members give a comment in the free-form section response, we have absolutely no idea and can only speculate as to the reasons for their dissatisfaction or satisfaction.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Would you like to speculate?

**Mr Bremner:** Would I like to speculate? I suspect our responses are skewed somewhat by members perhaps, especially in respect to information technology, not differentiating between the services that the parliamentary IT provide and services maybe provided by some other agencies. I suspect that our results are influenced, perhaps adversely, by that. As far as some of the other comments you have made, once again, unless members make specific comments—we take note of all those comments—if a member does not return an anonymous survey, if they put their name on it, and if they make a substantive comment, either me or one of the managers will get back to the member to discuss it and find out exactly what the issue is that they are suggesting. We get some very good suggestions out of the surveys as well, and we have made changes in response to them. Last year for the first time, when we resumed after the election, in the note passed around to all members I actually included a half-page section on probably the top four or five comments that appear in the members survey, just to give members an idea of the types of things that were being done to address the issues raised in the survey. We are more than happy at any time to get comments from members about specific issues, but unless we hear those comments, they will not be picked up.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I should say at this point that I want to acknowledge the good work of Hansard in the house. I am surprised that there is not a 100 per cent rating for them.

**Mr Hunter:** They do rate very highly.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** They should, too, because they do a great job.

The next question is on the new phone system that was implemented. What was the cost of that system? Was it a fixed-price contract or a variable-price contract depending on how it ran through the process of implementation?

**Mr Bremner:** My recollection is that it was a fixed price of \$177 000 for the contract. There have been, however, some additional costs, largely to do with the acquisition of some further desktop hardware for some areas that required a capability to look at a number of other extensions in their immediate work area. So I would imagine we are getting close to \$200 000 for that program.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Maybe you could take it on notice and give us the final figure of what it was if you have not got it there.

**Mr Bremner:** Certainly, it will be taken on notice.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Were there problems with the implementation of it?

**Mr Bremner:** There were some issues that came to light during the implementation, and they mainly related to the fact that the handsets had changed, so staff and members were having to get used to new handsets with new functionality. We had an extensive publicity campaign. We had, and still have, a lot of FAQ information available on POWAnet regarding phones. We placed information on staff's and members' seats and chairs when we implemented the system. Some members and some staff chose to read that information; some did not and, as far as I know, they called the Helpdesk and the problem was alleviated. The other issue that came to light was the situation regarding call pickup. We addressed that through the respective party officers by giving all members a number of options for unanswered calls in their offices, whether they used voicemail or whether they used the switchboard et cetera, and I understand that has been resolved. I have not heard any complaints specifically relating to the telephone system for some months now.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** What guarantees can you give us about the security of the phone lines in light of the fact that, as I understand it, they are running across the Internet?

**Mr Bremner:** Can I take that on notice and we will come back to you with some information in respect of that?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** All right. What consultation was carried out amongst staff and members about their requirements for the phone system before the contract was let?

**Mr Bremner:** There was consultation with staff and also consultation with the parliamentary party officers, who were asked to provide information in respect of members, it is my understanding. There was a reasonable level of consultation with the staff and also with members, but not with members on a one-on-one basis; it was more with the party offices.

**The CHAIR:** For those parties that have parliamentary parties.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** If you could take on notice and provide us with a bit more detail of exactly what the nature of the consultation was, and if there were surveys or letters or whatever, requesting both the staff and members as to what their requirements and needs were.

**Mr Bremner:** Yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** My final question goes to both of you, and it comes out of my conversations with some of the newer members and the longstanding view they have on these issues. I have some sympathy with their views. The budget is done on an accrual basis by service, and there are fairly broad levels of service. Do you internally operate on a cash or accrual basis of allocating amounts of money by program, activity or area of the departments?

**Mr Peacock:** Certainly, in the Council's situation, we allocate nominal figures and try to keep reviews as to how we are performing each year against those matters. I do not know whether you want to add any thoughts to that?

**Mrs Timmerman:** It is a little difficult because I have been here for only one year. Certainly, with the PSD it is on an accrual basis internally. The Legislative Council, I would have said, would probably be more on a cash basis, but it is both cash and accrual internally. There are two different types of reports.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But it is done on the basis, say, that Hansard reporting will have a budget allocated to it and the Library will have an allocation.

**Mr Bremner:** Yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I guess there is an argument put by some of the other members in the chamber—again, I have some sympathy with that argument—that that sort of information is actually more meaningful for monitoring it. Would you be able to provide copies of your budget for the past couple of years and for the next couple of years on that basis to this committee? If you believe it needs to be kept confidential, you can advise us of that; and, if not, is there any reason why it could not be made public?

**Mr Peacock:** It would obviously be a policy decision that would have to be made but, as I said, I guess we could indicate what it cost to run committees, what we are budgeting for that and whether we have remained within budget, and those global figures. I would be very happy to put that to the President.

**Mr Bremner:** Similarly, after discussions with the President, we can come back to the committee appropriately.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** If it is able to get to that level of detail, I think that is the sort of stuff that members do find far more useful. There was a debate in the chamber just the other day about the fact that the accrual process is great for accountants, but for members of Parliament trying to understand the budget, having that information by program—both by department, and if it is allocated to a department, so much for travel and so much for some other purpose—and breaking it down to that level of detail would be useful.

**Mr Bremner:** If I might just add to that?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, sure.

**Mr Bremner:** The level of detail as far as staffing costs and as for all those types of costs are concerned, they are reported in certainly the PSD annual report, and I suspect also in the Council annual report, so that information is actually provided.

[4.40 pm]

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is a global figure again, though, is it not—your staffing costs? It is not by the actual business unit.

**Mr Bremner:** We show recurrent expenditure by unit, as a percentage. We show also recurrent expenditure by cost category, as a percentage.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** To some degree it is about that process of being able to say, for example, that the Library is getting so much money this year and it is being reduced this year, and there may be good reason why it is being reduced, perhaps because it got extra money last year for a specific purpose. That is the sort of information that is often far more meaningful for people to be able to understand where exactly the money is being spent. So if you could take that on notice and maybe get back to us, that would be fantastic.

**The CHAIR:** I have a general question about the issue that has been raised on numerous occasions about the discrepancy between the budget for the Assembly and that for the Council. Is it going to continue that way? Is there any way that that is going to change? It seems to me that, certainly in terms of what has come up in recent years about the capacity of committees to undertake certain types of inquiries, or to travel, that it can be a constraint.

**Mr Peacock:** Absolutely. Obviously, as I said in 2005, 2006 and 2007, we have been working on getting additional funding. We did achieve some additional funding in 2005. In that particular year, we had an additional \$435 000. Part of that was to in fact boost the funding for committees to undertake travel. At one point there in 2005, I think we had a budget of \$50 000, which really just would not go anywhere. We could not do proper planning for that. We have probably got closer to the \$200 000 mark now for travel, which is still probably not really adequate for today, but it is better than \$50 000. We have been working on trying to get additional funding. We have been reasonably successful over the past two or three budgets, I guess. I do not want to make a comparison between us and the Assembly in regards to their budget. I do not think that is the way we should be looking at it. What we do is ask what our core needs are and how we can fund those properly. When we put up a budget, it is based on those things; that is, what does the Council require to carry out those functions? In this particular budget, we were not successful in getting any additional funding for the new programs we have put up.

**The CHAIR:** Just finally, with the installation of the air conditioning in the chamber—that happened about 18 months ago, did it not?

**Mr Bremner:** It was done in 2006 in the Council and 2007 in the Assembly.

**The CHAIR:** I just wonder whether there has been any change in power consumption as a consequence of that. It seems to me that it is a very difficult shaped room to cool. If you do not know the answer, I could take it on notice.

**Mr Bremner:** We can take it on notice. However, I do not know whether we could differentiate what component of any increase or decrease in overall energy usage relates specifically to the air conditioning.

**The CHAIR:** I guess that once the chamber was air conditioned, that seemed to be a point of reference. That first summer might have given some indication.

**Mr Hunter:** That information is available.

**Mr Peacock:** We can get that information for you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your attendance this afternoon. I think we will end the hearing here.

**Hearing concluded at 4.44 pm**