

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

2022–23 BUDGET ESTIMATES



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
MONDAY, 20 JUNE 2022**

SESSION THREE

DEPARTMENT OF THE PREMIER AND CABINET

Members

**Hon Peter Collier (Chair)
Hon Samantha Rowe (Deputy Chair)
Hon Jackie Jarvis
Hon Nick Goiran
Hon Dr Brad Pettitt**

Hearing commenced at 4.14 pm

HON SUE ELLERY

Minister for Education and Training representing the Premier, examined:

Ms EMILY ROPER

Director General, examined:

Mr ANDRE BRENDER-A-BRANDIS

Chief Finance Officer, examined:

Ms ELISABETH FELLS

Acting Executive Director, State Services, examined:

Mr GREG ITALIANO

Government Chief Information Officer, examined:

Mr CHRIS CLARK

Deputy Director General, Economy, Industry, Environment and Infrastructure, examined:

Ms SUSAN MEAGHAN

Special Adviser, Native Title, examined:

Ms FIONA HUNT

Deputy Director General, Aboriginal Engagement and Community Policy, examined:

Ms AMANDA PICKRELL

Deputy Director General, Intergovernmental Relations and COVID-19, examined:

The CHAIR: Welcome to today's estimates hearing everyone, particularly the witnesses. The committee acknowledges and honours the traditional owners of the ancestral lands upon which we meet today, the Whadjuk Noongar people, and pays its respects to their elders both past and present.

To all witnesses, have you read, understood and signed the document titled "Information for Witnesses"?

[Witnesses nodded.]

The CHAIR: That is a unanimous acknowledgement of "yes".

Your testimony before the committee must be complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The committee will place the uncorrected transcript of your evidence on the internet a few days after the hearing. When the transcript is finalised, the uncorrected version will be replaced by the finalised version. This is a public hearing, but the committee can elect to hear evidence in private. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question.

Members, before asking a question, I ask that you provide the relevant page and paragraph number where possible.

Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Hon SUE ELLERY: No; I am fine, thank you chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will move straight to the committee. Hon Samantha Rowe.

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: Thank you, chair. I refer to budget paper No 2, page 68, “Government Policy Management — Whole-of-Government”. I understand that DPC is leading the whole-of-government coordination of the Perth City Deal. As someone who benefited from attending an inner-city university—I went to RMIT in Bourke Street in Melbourne CBD—I have seen how beneficial it can be to have an inner-city uni and what that means for bringing that city to life. Minister, are you able to inform us on where we are at with ECU’s inner-city campus?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I can; thank you. The Perth City Deal is a \$1.5 billion partnership with the WA government and the commonwealth government is putting in the bulk of the investment. It is expected to bring people jobs, activity and vibrancy to Perth’s city centre. The state government had committed funding towards new and expanded inner-city campuses for Edith Cowan, Murdoch and Curtin Universities. In respect to Murdoch’s proposal, it was developed just before the beginning of the pandemic; it was for a vertical campus in the CBD. The proposal was predicated on an increase in international students. Given the impact, though, of COVID-19, Murdoch has reconsidered its proposal. Murdoch advised the government earlier this year that it could no longer proceed. That is disappointing to the government. It has meant that the state government’s contribution that was committed to Murdoch University can be allocated to Edith Cowan University’s inner-city campus. Edith Cowan University’s inner-city campus was facing significant cost escalation pressures. The state government worked with the previous commonwealth government to address those issues. The project cost now is \$853 million and it will reinvigorate Perth’s city centre. It is expected to bring over 9 000 students and staff to the city when it first opens. That will generate considerable spending in the city. It is the state government and commonwealth government along with ECU funding this game-changing project. There are others—I note, that the City of Perth has claimed credit for despite not putting in anything to the project or contributing. This is the state and commonwealth governments doing the heavy lifting. In respect to Curtin University, Curtin is still committed to its proposal to expand its presence in East Perth and the development of the business case is well progressed. The state government’s funding commitment for their proposal remains unchanged—it is still there—and we are looking forward to that project progressing.

[4.20 pm]

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: Thank you.

Hon JACKIE JARVIS: Also on that same line item, with regards to the strategic policy advice and coordination within DPC, at the top of page 68, it mentions “leadership and coordination of cross-agency solutions”. From what I can gather, the Collie delivery unit also sits within the DPC. Given the announcement last week with regards to the Collie Just Transition Plan, I am hoping you can provide an update as to what is happening at Collie in addition to what has happened previously.

Hon SUE ELLERY: This is a \$662 million Collie transition package. We are committed as a government to supporting Collie and its workers, like we have done so far. In the \$662 million transition package, it includes an additional \$547.4 million. That is on top of the \$115 million that has already been allocated. This package will provide more opportunities for workers and the community. There is a \$200 million Collie industrial transition fund. That will attract new industries and major projects to

Collie and help prepare industrial land for development. It will support new and emerging industries. There are potential opportunities in battery and wind turbine manufacturing, hydrogen, green cement and minerals processing.

In respect to the decommissioning of power stations, there is another opportunity. This will happen immediately after each asset is retired. That is a pipeline of work particularly for the blue-collar workforce. We have invested an additional \$12 million to expand the Collie Jobs and Skills Centre and provide free skills assessment and training, bringing the total to \$16.9 million. That jobs and skills centre is a one-stop shop for Collie—for workforce transition services; free career training and employment advice, for individuals as well as businesses; fee-free skills assessments; and recognition of prior learning to utilise workers' existing skills and knowledge to get a formal qualification and identify any skills gaps. They will provide free training for impacted workers who wish to undertake a full qualification or a short course. The centre will also help to connect jobseekers with employment opportunities and help employers attract and recruit employees. There are also \$5 million for onsite training facilities and \$4 million dollars for the Collie Futures curriculum fund, for that fund to develop industry-specific skills training to meet emerging skills in Collie.

The investment to date in tourism is almost \$40 million, leading to a 73 per cent increase in tourists at the Wellington Dam mural. There is \$10 million for Collie Trails, Lake Kepwari and upgrades to the Wellington National Park.

In industry, we have already established the emergency services vehicle manufacturing facility. There is WesTrac's autonomous technology training facility and DMIRS' regional processing centre. Then, there is investment in upcoming projects: \$2 million in a medicinal cannabis cultivation and processing facility, which Hon Dr Brian Walker will be thrilled about, and \$2 million for downstream processing of graphite.

Hon JACKIE JARVIS: Thank you.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: Thank you. I would like to start by referring to page 64, "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency", and point 5, the Perth Casino Royal Commission. I was wondering if you are able to provide a progress update on the government's initial response to that, as indicated on the bottom of page 64, please.

Hon SUE ELLERY: It is important to note that the funding that is managed by DPC is for coordinating the government response. You would be aware that it is Minister Buti who is dealing with implementing further recommendations, whether that goes to legislative change and the like. DPC is coordinating the detailed consideration to inform the government response. There are some immediate reforms that the department is assisting with, including the appointment of an independent monitor to oversee the remediation work and an independent chair for the Gaming and Wagering Commission. There are some changes that the government has already implemented around governance culture and regulatory reforms, including the appointment of a dedicated executive director for racing, gaming and liquor. Additional resources are for the Gaming and Wagering Commission and an updated conflict-of-interest policy.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: Thank you. You answered my further questions, so thank you. On another one entirely—on the same page, under "Spending Changes" and about halfway down the list.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Remind me of the page number again, honourable member.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: We are on page 64. Under "Spending Changes" is the list there. Under "Other", one of them is a budget line titled "Development Options for Potential Systems to Identify Electric Vehicle Usage". I was wondering if you are able to provide some detail around that, please.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Good question. This one here.

The funding is being provided to the Office of Digital Government to develop a business case for a system to collect and monitor the road-user charges for zero and low-emission light vehicles as part of our reform package for those vehicles. A distance-based road-user charge will be introduced for those vehicles from 2027, in line with the approach from other jurisdictions. The department will investigate systems options to monitor and collect those user charges. The funding will be utilised for consultancy services and a contracted resource to lead the development of that business case. That resource will undertake the research, look across jurisdictional engagement and analysis, and engage with the Departments of Treasury and Transport to come up with a range of options as to how that is to be done. The department will also engage a consultancy service to understand the zero and low-emission light vehicle modelling to ensure that the recommended system is futureproofed and can be scaled to growing demand. Obviously, we expect that it will just grow.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: This is just a follow-up to that one, and you may not be able to answer this. I guess, the key part of that is: is the expectation of government that that future system will be one that is consistent with other states—an Australia-wide system? Obviously, what it is replacing is an Australia-wide tax with a state-based tax, but is the intention that we will be consistent across states?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I guess we would want to avoid what happened when Australia discovered railways and decided that each jurisdiction would have a different gauge. As I understand it—I will get the director general to confirm this—part of the work that will be done in the business case is looking at cross-jurisdictional engagement and analysis, but I might ask the director general to make some comments about that.

Ms ROPER: Obviously, ideally we would have a national system, but it has been somewhat in the federal government's hands whether that was going to occur. Victoria has already moved to an implementation, so they are the ones who have got their cards on the table. We would be looking to align as closely as possible, but we are really at the business case stage. It is probably too early to say where we will end up.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: Thanks.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Minister, if I can take you to page 67, which sets out the “Administration of Executive Government Services”, you will see halfway down the page that the average operating cost per ministerial office is just shy of \$3 million. Does the department keep a record of any flights taken by ministers? Is that incorporated as part of those costs?

[4.30 pm]

Hon SUE ELLERY: The answer is yes. Honourable member, each ministerial office, including the Leader of the Opposition's office, gets a budget, and if the minister needs to travel, it comes out of that budget.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Right. Earlier today we had budget estimates for the Department of Justice and the State Solicitor's Office, and they both confirmed that neither of them paid for the Attorney General's flight back to Sydney to redo his evidence in court. Was it the Department of the Premier and Cabinet that funded that?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I could not answer that question; I would not have it here. I am happy to take it on notice, honourable member.

[*Supplementary Information No C1.*]

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Minister, do you have any information here at the moment on ministerial cost of travel?

Hon SUE ELLERY: No, I do not have an individualised list of such things.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: For example, the Premier is about to embark on a trip to Italy. You would not have any information about that here today?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I do not think I have it here, but I will just check. No.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Does the department receive things like itineraries for ministers when they go on overseas travel?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am advised not necessarily. There is a process by which travel needs to be authorised—I can get that for you; I do not have it here—because, for example, you have to put in place an acting minister, so there must be some process of approval. I do not have information on it here, but I am happy to take it on notice.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Who approves the travel for the Premier?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I would have to take that on notice as well; I do not have an answer to that here. We will condense that as part of C2.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: There was, shall I say, an episode last week where the Minister for Emergency Services was away on urgent parliamentary business and you kindly took it upon yourself to find out that there was, indeed, an Acting Minister for Emergency Services. In that scenario, with that particular travel, which I understood was to the United States, do you have information on who would have approved that travel?

Hon SUE ELLERY: No.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Can we take it on notice?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Sure.

The CHAIR: That will also be contained in C2.

[Supplementary Information No C2.]

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The minister will see on page 67 that the second service item is the administration of parliamentary support. There it says that the average cost of entitlements per member of Parliament is something in the range for the current year of \$350 000. Would that include funding for the defending of any unfair dismissal cases brought by electorate officers?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I do not think that it covers that, honourable member. That money is expended on their electorate offices and the like; and I do imagine that is covered there.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: You do not imagine or it is not?

Hon SUE ELLERY: It is not covered there.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Who pays for those costs then? Is the department involved in any human resource, industrial relations-type activities for the offices of members of Parliament?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am advised that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet would bear the cost for any of that kind of action. I am not sure that it is reflected in the budget papers, but that is what the department would cover.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So, it is a sub-item somewhere in the department's budget total appropriation for the coming budget year of \$249.04 million. It is part of that?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Honourable member, the way that I am advised this operates, it is kind of two agencies within the same government. For example, costs might be generated by the State Solicitor's Office and attributed to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet; there is no actual handing over of cash.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: That is right. So that repayment to the State Solicitor's Office is then covered as part of this \$249 million?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I was getting advice when you were talking. As part of the overall appropriation?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Yes.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes; that is what I am advised.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: How much have these matters for unfair dismissal cases brought by electorate officers cost?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I do not have that information here, honourable member.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: All right; but it is able to be obtained by the department?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I can ask.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Very good.

[Supplementary Information No C3.]

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I know the department keeps a record of all kinds of things—gifts, travel, seemingly unfair dismissal cases and the like—does it keep a copy of any complaints that it receives about ministers?

Hon SUE ELLERY: If the complaint is lodged with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, yes they do.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Right. Because I asked last month about this and I was told in an answer that the office of the Premier is unable to identify the complaint to which I was referring. It is correct that if I want to pursue a complaint on behalf of somebody—somebody has lodged a complaint with the Premier of Western Australia—that the department would indeed keep a record of these things?

Hon SUE ELLERY: The Department of the Premier and Cabinet keeps a record of complaints that are lodged with it. If I understand the answer that the member just said he was given, that is the office of the Premier saying they were not aware of a particular complaint. I do not know the circumstances of the question, honourable member. I am sorry I do not recall it. I am not sure I could take that much further.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The point being that if somebody writes to the Premier with a complaint about a minister, I am trying to ascertain where that document would be stored? Would it be stored in the office of the Premier or with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet?

Hon SUE ELLERY: First thing to note is that I am advised there were no formal complaints lodged in respect of departmental, ministerial or electorate staff in the 2021–22 financial year. I am also advised there are no active complaints being investigated by the department. There are two employees, one current and one former, who are currently the subject of ongoing legal proceedings. If what you are suggesting, hypothetically, somebody made a complaint about a staff member to the —

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Not about a staff member—about a minister.

Hon SUE ELLERY: If a staff member made a complaint about a minister, is that what you are talking about?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: In this particular instance, it is not a staff member; it is a Western Australian association. They have had a meeting with the Attorney General and they have complained that he has fallen asleep twice in the course of the meeting.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I do not know who they would complain to.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: To the Premier of Western Australia, Mark McGowan.

Hon SUE ELLERY: It would depend entirely on the nature of the complaint. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet's responsibility is in respect to formal complaints by staff members, by people that they are responsible for employing, as opposed to an external stakeholder, political organisation, that might be unhappy with a particular minister. If that is what went to the Premier, then it would not necessarily go to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet at all.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: That is what I wanted to know, thank you.

The CHAIR: We are going to have to move on.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Minister, before we jump to where I was going to start, I was interested to hear your response to Hon Samantha Rowe's question around the Collie transition process. I think you indicated that of the new \$650 million package, I think the number you used was \$115 million was pre-existing. Are you in any position to give us an indication of how successful the expenditure has been to date? I am most interested in how many full-time equivalent jobs would have been created from expenditure in the program so far?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I do not think I have it here, but I will have a quick look. I have some in terms of the front line fire and emergency equipment to establish emergency services: the vehicle manufacturing facility created 12 ongoing jobs; the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety regional processing centre is delivering 15 permanent jobs; the Koolinup emergency services centre created 130 jobs through construction and 13 ongoing jobs; the \$2 million WesTrac autonomous technology training facility, 31 construction and five ongoing jobs; and over 350 students have completed their training at that facility.

[4.40 pm]

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: That is a good facility, by the way.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I do not have any job numbers with respect to tourism.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I appreciate the information you were able to give us. Thank you for that. Maybe we could seek that you might ask, by way of further information, for the other remaining job numbers for that expenditure. Is that reasonable?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am not sure that I would get it because that is tourism related. I am not sure that it is held by this agency.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Let us move on. Thank you very much for that. That was a nice question from Hon Samantha Rowe.

Hon SUE ELLERY: It was actually Hon Jackie Jarvis, who is outraged that you did not recognise that.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Sorry. Minister, on page 72 you basically have FTE numbers for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. It is in reference (b), midway down the page. I want to try to relate that to the table on top of page 64, which is the indication of spending changes. I will reference some information provided by the Premier in the estimates in the house that shall not be named because, obviously, you are a representative minister here. There is an amount there of \$15 million for the budget year, \$12 million, \$2 million and \$2 million going forward, which presumably is partly for increase of employees, which was the answer in the lower house estimates,

\$6 million approximately in 2022–23 and 2023–24, dropping to \$4 million in 2024–25 and 2025–26. That was dropped because the full-time employees in that section, apparently, for 2022–23 and 2023–24 was 42 in total, dropping down to 12 in the later two years. First question: given this is “COVID-19 Coordination and Communications” and the budget indicates on page 64 that the estimated actual for 2021–22 was zero, obviously this expenditure did not start—surely COVID coordination and communications has been happening now for some years. There must have been a budget transfer somehow to accommodate for that.

Hon SUE ELLERY: When this began, every agency was asked to see if we could find people to be seconded into the system. There was kind of in-kind support across government as all agencies put people into various teams. There was not necessarily an allocation of funds.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Okay. The suggestion is that the COVID-19 coordination and communications program was funded entirely in house up until the 2022–23 financial year, which starts in a few weeks.

Hon SUE ELLERY: No.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Where do we find it?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will see what I can find for you.

I am advised that the line item you are referring to is “Spending Changes”. It is not about where the budget actually sits. I will see if I can find somewhere in the document where the COVID expenditure is set out. You might have to look, honourable member, at previous budget papers. I will see if I can find something more specific. I can advise, honourable member, for the COVID-19 communications campaign in 2019–20, the allocation was \$3 million. In 2020–21, the COVID-19 communications funding was \$3.32 million. The COVID-19 communications campaign phase 3 in 2020–21 was \$4.36 million.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: That is a good indication, thank you. This new funding then is a total of \$31.7 million. Given that we are so far through the COVID process, what is the need to spend effectively two or three times the amount of money on COVID coordination and communications than we did through the peak of COVID and through the outbreak stages?

Hon SUE ELLERY: You will see in the budget papers that it drops down considerably in 2024–25 to 2025–26. Of that, \$31.6 million was provided until 2025–26 to support the government’s ongoing management of COVID-19. In 2022–23, \$6.1 million was for FTE—that is 26 comms and 16 coordinators; \$250 000 for consultancy services; and \$8.62 million for communication activities. In 2023–24, again, \$6.3 million for FTE, \$250 000 for consultancy services and \$6.1 million for communication services. That is essentially it.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I have that information. I am happy to accept that, minister. I have looked at previous budgets in relation to the total staffing of Premier and Cabinet, which in 2016–17 was 673 FTE; in 2017–18, 687; and in 2018–19, 683. The 2021–22 estimated actual is 813. Presumably then, if there is going to be any increase, this 42 FTE presumably is the increase. The budget estimate for the total FTEs is 856, which means if you add the 42 in from the COVID process, there is room for one extra staff member in that 856 number. Can I get you to explain that that is the case—that basically all of the increase in FTEs will be associated with COVID? That will mean that from when this government came to power in 2017–18, from 687 there is a 183 increase in FTE to get to 856, of which 42, as far as I can tell, are COVID. What proportion of the increase of that 183 FTEs is COVID? You might have to supply it by way of supplementary information. Can we get that broken down?

Hon SUE ELLERY: A couple of things. I am advised that all the COVID ones are finite, so they are not ongoing. Some of that increase in FTE is around digital capability.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: If they are finite, I assume they are a short-term temporary contract.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Correct.

The CHAIR: If we cannot get it, we will have to move on. We still have a number of other members wanting to ask questions. Can we get that information?

Hon SUE ELLERY: We can talk to it now.

Ms ROPER: Through the minister, I will hand over to our CFO, Andre Brender-A-Brandis, who can explain.

Mr BRENDER-A-BRANDIS: Thank you for the question, member. The 183 increase over the 2020–21 year to the 2022–23 year is made up of the five services. If we look at the first service, there is a marginal increase of only two over that period. That is the service for executive government. With regard to parliamentary support, there is a net decrease of six FTE. The whole of government is the key one that you are actually looking at. That increases from 122 to 158. That does include net movements of COVID support plus also other direct costs attributed to the whole-of-government support as well as an allocation of the indirect staff who support that service.

[4.50 pm]

The fourth function, which is Aboriginal Affairs has only a marginal increase of three FTE. The ICT function has grown quite substantially over that period by 72 FTE, from 60 to 112 due to all the initiatives that are currently in play with regard to ICT. The mix and composition of the 183 is across the five services and roughly 36 are attributed to the third service, which is whole of government.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: My question relates to page 64 and Aboriginal Affairs native title agreements and that the state's engagement in negotiating litigated settlements for native title compensation is expected to grow in the forward estimates. What negotiations are currently on foot that are likely to drive growth?

Hon SUE ELLERY: We updating the native title compensation policy. It is expected to grow. We are committed to resolving native title matters by agreement where possible, which generates improved social and economic outcomes. This commitment to working in partnership with traditional owners is evidenced by the delivery of the nationally significant Yamatji Nation Indigenous land use agreement, the south west settlement agreement and the Gibson Desert Pila Nature Reserve agreement. There are currently 130 determinations of native title within WA. The three agreements I just referenced provide full and final settlement for past acts. Additionally, the WA government is responding to native title compensation claims that have been lodged in the Federal Court during 2021–22, with eight active native title compensation applications currently filed in the court. These include claims brought in by the Tjiwarl native title holders, Yindjibarndi native title holders and Marralan Darrigaru—I apologise for my appalling pronunciation of that—native title holders.

The WA government has also entered into broader negotiations with other native title holding groups outside the Federal Court process. There are five groups. Each of those negotiations will likely result in a broader benefits package, with settlement payments being made. That is an emerging area of work in coming years.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Further to that, I refer to page 75 and details of administered transactions, related to departmental administered transactions. Are any of those negotiations the minister outlined, not including the ones in that table, likely to arise in additional administered transactions?

Hon SUE ELLERY: You are asking if that is where those settlements are reflected? Is that what you are asking?

Hon NEIL THOMSON: I am asking whether there will be increased growth in the administered transactions.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Those ones listed on page 75 are settled—full and final settlement.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Of those additional eight you listed, is there a likelihood that they will become part of this table in the out years?

Hon SUE ELLERY: In future budget papers, quite possibly.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: One last question in relation to liability for those administered transactions that are an income stream. Under section 125A of the Mining Act there is a capacity for the liability to be paid by tenement holders. Are there any negotiations afoot currently that would increase liability for administered transactions?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Not to my knowledge.

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: I refer the minister budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 65 and specifically the second line, headed service summary, that deals with administration of parliamentary support. The minister will be aware that we on the crossbench have asked repeatedly for more consideration when it comes to resources, as in previous Parliaments. It was denied to us this year. As far as I am aware, our letter to the Premier went unanswered—my letter from 8 February, for example. Looking at the figures laid out before us, I note the gentle rise across the forward estimates. Presumably, that is to take into account increased wage costs and the like, but I cannot help notice that last year's actual was almost \$2 million more than had been budgeted and \$1 million more than the furthest out year—the figure for 2025–26. Could the minister unpack that decrease in support spending for us?

Hon SUE ELLERY: The decrease mainly reflects the staff termination payments in 2021–22, following the state election, and overhead cost allocation variations.

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: On the preceding page of budget paper No 2, volume 1—that is, page 64—under the title “Digital Transformation” it is nice to see that the department is leading, supporting and coordinating the digital transformation of the WA public sector. As an example, in my own office, my internet is very scrappy and there are times when I simply cannot function there because of the lack of internet access and the team cannot properly support my parliamentary functions in a timely manner. The question I have for you is: how much money has been allocated to the digital transformation question and what portion of that, if any, is earmarked for those in parliamentary support roles?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will see if we can find the answer to that. Of course, the state government is not responsible for broadband and the internet and the NBN. My office is in Riverton and I reckon it has got the worst internet connection anywhere. It is random. I am not sure there is much —

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The rent is pretty expensive.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I saw that on that list. I inherited Hon Mike Nahan's electorate office. That is beside the point. I will see if we can get a breakdown. I will get someone to explain that but I will make the point that it is across the whole of government; it is not just about DPC. I will ask Mr Italiano to address that.

Mr ITALIANO: Thank you, minister. I thank the member for the question. The reference to digital transformation is really in the context of the department's whole-of-government role in terms of leading and coordinating digital transformation across such things as cybersecurity, services to

citizens, digital inclusion and the like. It is not a reference to what I might term corporate services provided to members of Parliament. I am unable to equate those so the spending changes for digital transformation are actually contained on page 64 and listed. None of those items will help with respect to identifying particular expenditure of the nature that was posed in the question. Unfortunately, from a budget paper perspective, the reference to digital transformation is a broad one and it is for whole of government as opposed to services of the nature referred to.

Hon KLARA ANDRIC: I refer to budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 64 and spending changes. I refer to the intergovernmental relations directorate. Noting the changes in the federal–state relations since COVID-19, are you able to provide an update on how the department is developing its intergovernmental relations to benefit the state?

[5.00 pm]

Hon SUE ELLERY: Thank you. It is the case that the volume of support required for federal–state relations has significantly increased with reforms to federal relations architecture. The honourable member might be aware that there is a range of ministerial committees. All of that was reviewed—the kind of structure of all of that was reviewed—after national cabinet was formed at the beginning of COVID-19. An amount of \$4.9 million over the forward estimates for the Intergovernmental Relations Directorate team is required to provide adequate resourcing to meet current and future federal–state relations obligations and requirements. The directorate coordinated with agencies and other jurisdictions to develop policy, advice and briefing material for 24 national cabinet meetings since July 2020. As one of the ministers engaged in that, I can say that you had to be able to move on a dime to meet the advice for those meetings. Anyway, do not get me started on that. Keeping pace with the commonwealth is important to support better outcomes for WA, particularly in respect to negotiating funding agreements. A core function of the team is to work across government, and we continue to advocate that funding for COVID-19 is continued past September 2022, so it was pleasing to see the commitment to health COVID-related funding extended to the end of the year coming out of the meeting last week. The directorate is also working with other agencies to establish the automatic mutual recognition scheme and they will continue to lead the state government advocacy to maximise the outcomes for WA from our relationship with the commonwealth.

Hon SHELLEY PAYNE: On the same page under “Spending Changes” with regards to the COVID-19 response, I was wondering if you could provide an update on the free RAT program and how it has been able to support our communities?

Hon SUE ELLERY: RATs—I can. In what was an Australian first, WA’s free RAT program distributed RATs to households—that is rapid antigen tests—across the state. They are an essential tool in minimising the spread and supporting our testing and isolation protocols, and they provide an extra layer of confidence to families. We secured 110.7 million RATs—I feel like maybe 109 million are in my office—to ensure that we have the supply needed to continue to keep WA safe. Over the last five months, more than 40 million of those have already been distributed to the general public and to workers in certain industries. All efforts are being made to ensure that every Western Australian, wherever they are, has access to a supply to reduce the burden of costs that may limit some families. A further 740 000 have been distributed via pop-ups at train stations, shopping centres, major events, TAFEs and universities. Approximately 1.5 million have been allocated to community service organisations, community resource centres and members of Parliament for distribution to community members, and approximately 150 000 free RATs were allocated to regional and remote households via local health and medical services. There are also free RATs distributed for use by health and education workers who are working in higher risk environments, and, more recently, 10

free RATs have been offered from a range of collection points for anyone who self-identifies as a close contact, and almost 12 million RATs have been distributed through schools and childcare centres for use by children.

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: I just first indicate that I am asking a question on behalf of a colleague that could not be here for this session. For reference, I am looking at two reference points: page 64, “Kimberley Youth and Community Justice Response”, but, more relevantly, page 68 under the “Government Policy Management—Whole-of-Government” response. The question I have is: I understand that there is a whole-of-government response to the issue about Kimberley youth justice. I also understand that Premier and Cabinet are taking the overriding response to that. The question I have is: can you explain what the response includes?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I can. So there is funding of some \$250 000 which forms part of a broader package that is made up of nine initiatives to support improved youth justice and community safety outcomes in the Kimberley. Those funds are held by the department, with funding released to planning initiatives identified and endorsed by the Kimberley Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing Steering Committee. That steering committee was established to oversee the implementation of the commitment. Membership comprises representatives from state government agencies as well as key Aboriginal representatives in the Kimberley. It is the appropriate regional governance body to inform the development of those initiatives. The funding will enable the Kimberley youth and community justice response to incorporate Aboriginal-led and locally driven initiatives, support strong partnerships and to leverage established regional governance arrangements.

The CHAIR: I have just got a quick one before I go back to Hon Dr Steve Thomas. Just with regard to electorate offices—one in particular, for Hon Neil Thomson; it might be for the director general, this one—what is the status of his office? It has now been over 12 months.

Hon SUE ELLERY: We will take it on notice. We do not have any detail on the status.

The CHAIR: Okay. He would really appreciate it. He really is getting a bit frustrated because, as I said, he has been over 12 months without an office, so that would be great.

[*Supplementary Information No C4.*]

The CHAIR: I will go back to Hon Dr Steve Thomas.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Thank you, chair. I might just follow that one up. Minister, can you give us an indication of how many new offices have been created since the election in March 2021 and how many of those are government offices?

Hon SUE ELLERY: If I can, I will. I am going to have to take that on notice. I do not have a list here.

[*Supplementary Information No C5.*]

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: If I could, chair.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Minister, page 64, the “Quarantine Project—Multi-Agency Project Team”. I presume that is the federal government’s quarantine facility. Can I just confirm that?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes, it is.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It is now largely constructed. Is there any ongoing liability to the state government for either maintenance or operations, or is there any liability that the state government has to maintain this facility, or is it the case that the state government can give the keys back to the federal government and potentially say it is not needed?

Hon SUE ELLERY: We have an arrangement in place, I think, for 12 months. Let me see if I can get you some more detail.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I note there is an estimated actual for the current financial year that finishes and there is nothing going forward from 1 July.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes. So, we have a memorandum of understanding between the state and federal government to commission the facility. Funding was provisioned for 12 months of operation of the facility. The state is keen to work with the commonwealth to explore alternative uses for the facility. We would probably want to keep some capacity available in the event there is a new version of the pandemic that creates a problem for us, but discussions really are at an early stage with the commonwealth about what we might do with that place.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Do we have an indication of the cost, even for the first 12 months? Is that not a Premier and Cabinet expense?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am advised it sits within the health budget, and we are still going through the procurement process, so we are not sure what the final cost of that will be. From our point of view, the commonwealth came at this too little, too late.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It will be interesting to see what that does..

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The “Reconnect WA—Build a Life Campaign”, which I see had \$3.5 million in the current financial year and \$1.6 million —

Hon SUE ELLERY: What page are you on, honourable member?

[5.10 pm]

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It is about three lines below the one we referenced last time, so you do not have to shift. That \$1.6 million is obviously expected to be a one-year expense. Was thought given to making this a longer-term program? I suspect you are going to struggle to get immigration or any of those things done in that period of time.

Hon SUE ELLERY: That is all that there is now. The government is obviously very keen to maximise capacity to get a skilled workforce here, so if we need more money, that is what we will allocate, but that is what has been allocated for now.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: In relation to that program, what is the government’s strategy for housing people that it may be able to get in place? If you are looking to get X-thousand people migrating into Western Australia, at the moment I know the program is called Build a Life, but it takes two years to build a house, and if you are out there competing in the rental market, you might be competing against 60 or 70 other people for the same residential place. Is there a concurrent program around housing that is likely to make capacity available?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Sure, except you are asking the wrong minister in the wrong representative capacity. There is work being undertaken in the housing portfolio, but I am not representing that in this hearing.

The CHAIR: I just have one question before we wrap up, unless there is anything else. Can I just confirm, in regard to our electorate offices, that we cannot have labelling of political parties on those offices?

Hon SUE ELLERY: That is what I have been told for 21 years.

The CHAIR: Yes, that is absolutely what I have been told, and I am hearing some contradictory advice lately, but has that shifted?

Hon SUE ELLERY: The director general is not aware, but we will take that on notice.

[*Supplementary Information No C6.*]

Hon NICK GOIRAN: On page 68, one of the other services that is provided by the department is government policy management, whole-of-government. You will see that the third dot point there relates to emergency management policy advice to the Premier, ministers and government agencies. There was a state of emergency declared on 30 May this year, with effect from 12.00 am on 3 June to 12.00 am on 17 June. Did the department provide any advice to acting Minister Buti last week to extend the state of emergency?

Hon SUE ELLERY: That advice is not provided by DPC.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So where it refers to emergency management policy advice to the Premier, ministers and government agencies, it should not —

Hon SUE ELLERY: It is not about the status of the emergency, but through the cabinet subcommittees, for example, that oversight COVID, DPC provides us advice through that process.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: It says here emergency management policy advice to the Premier, ministers and government agencies. You are saying that that does not include the state of emergency?

Hon SUE ELLERY: It does not include the provision of advice to the Minister for Emergency Services on whether or not he should continue to sign the state of emergency documents. That is provided by the Commissioner of Police.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: What kind of advice do they give, then?

Hon SUE ELLERY: All sorts of advice, honourable member, as I just said—through the cabinet subcommittee that has responsibility for oversight and recommendations to cabinet on all sorts of matters related to COVID. For example, RATs was one. RATs were required by the health workforce, so there was a series of procurement decisions to be made about RATs for Health, and then RATs for everyone else. DPC provides all sorts of advice and has for two and a half years. That is a cabinet subcommittee that I sit on, and they provide regular advice through that subcommittee to cabinet.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So when the Chief Health Officer provides advice to the Premier with respect to the state of emergency, that type of advice is not kept by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet?

Hon SUE ELLERY: It is not generated by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet —

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I know that. It is obviously generated by the —

Hon SUE ELLERY: They keep it because the advice goes through the cabinet subcommittee process, and so to the extent that documents need to be held for the purpose of the cabinet subcommittee and then cabinet, that is managed through cabinet services, which is part of DPC.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So they do have the advice.

Hon SUE ELLERY: They hold it, if it has been through that process. They do not generate advice, for example, from the Chief Health Officer. He does that himself.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: That is right. He is sending it to the Premier. He sends the advice to the Premier, presumably the Premier reads it, possibly the Minister for Emergency Services does when he is not in America promoting WA, and maybe the acting minister does as well, but the department does not provide it to any of those ministers?

Hon SUE ELLERY: There is a cabinet subcommittee process that a number of ministers are on, including me. That cabinet subcommittee receives advice from the Chief Health Officer, from the DPC, the State Emergency Coordinator, and from anyone else who needs to give advice for government to consider.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I thought you just said that DPC does not provide advice on this.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am not trying to be tricky, but not in respect of the documents that need to be signed to determine whether or not a state of emergency continues.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I thank everyone for attending, particularly the witnesses. Members may lodge any remaining questions through the electronic lodgement system, which closes at 5.00 pm on 1 July 2022. Witnesses, the committee will forward the uncorrected transcript of evidence with questions taken on notice highlighted as soon as possible after the hearing. Responses to questions on notice are due by 5.00 pm on 20 July, 2022. Should you be unable to meet the due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons why the due date cannot be met. Once again, thank you very much for your attendance today.

Hearing concluded at 5.16 pm
