
CHAPTER 5 COMMITTEE OPERATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The Committee Division comprises the Committee Office which is responsible for the provision of accurate and timely professional advice, research services and administrative support to Council committees, certain joint committees and other committees which may be appointed by the Council. Its main functions include the allocation to each committee of adequate and competent staff, the provision of financial resources, the analysis of evidence and the presentation of reports to Parliament.



Committee Meeting Rooms, 1110 Hay Street

Parliamentary committees

The Council establishes standing⁶ and select⁷ committees to investigate specific issues and report back to the House.

The Houses may together appoint 'joint' standing or select committees. Joint committees consist of Members from, and report to, both Houses of Parliament.

As at June 30 2005 standing committees administered by the Council were:⁸

- Environment and Public Affairs Committee;
- Estimates and Financial Operations Committee;
- Legislation Committee;
- Parliamentary Services Committee;
- Procedure and Privileges Committee;

⁶ Standing committees are established by Standing Orders and their existence survives dissolution of the Assembly. Standing committees have a defined set of functions to perform (terms of reference).

⁷ Select committee are established to carry out specialised inquiries. They have a limited life, are defined by the terms of their appointment, and dissolve once their inquiry is completed or if Parliament is prorogued (whichever event first occurs).

⁸ New standing committees were established on August 17 2005.

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- Public Administration and Finance Committee;
 - Uniform Legislation and General Purpose Committee; and
 - Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

Some standing committees have a power to initiate their own inquiries. Standing committees may monitor and review government activity or review legislation.

Each year standing committees also report an overview of their activities to the House. All reports can be viewed on the Parliament Internet site: www.parliament.wa.gov.au.

During the reporting period the Committee Office supported the following select committees:

- Advocacy for Children (Appointment of a Commissioner for Children) Select Committee (appointed June 11 2003, reported July 2 2004); and
- Select Committee on Reserves (Reserve 43131) Bill 2003 (appointed June 25 2003, reported November 18 2004).

Committee work is an important and significant aspect of a Member's parliamentary work. During the reporting period 25 of the 34 Members were Members of at least one of the committees administered by the Council.⁹ (See appendix 5 for statistics relating to committee work in 2004-05.)

COMMITTEE OFFICE VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT

The vision of the Committee Office is *"to be the best in Australia in the provision of information, advice and executive support to parliamentary committees"*.

The Committee Office Vision and Mission Statement is attached as appendix 2.

COMMITTEE OPERATIONS

Support

The Committee Office operates as an executive team and in committee teams. The executive team comprises the Clerk Assistant (Committees) and the Executive Officer (Committees). The Clerk Assistant (Committees) also performs duties as Clerk at the Table in the chamber.

Each committee is supported by a committee team comprising an Advisory Officer and a Committee Clerk, with some committees sharing staff with other committees. All committees share support provided by an administrative assistant and, if appointed, an Articled Law Clerk. When a select committee has been appointed, it has been staffed from within the Department.

⁹ Excluding membership of the two domestic committees, the Parliamentary Services Committee and the Procedure and Privileges Committee.

The Committee Office aims to provide adequate and effective support to each committee while being able to move staff, when required, to committees with heavy workloads. On occasion committee staff may assist other committees with discrete inquiries.

In 2003-04 the number of Full Time Equivalents for the Committee Office was 15.05. This declined in 2004-05 to 13.1 due to natural attrition of staff. Recruitment was deferred because of budgetary constraints (see Cash Report). The appointment of an extra standing committee will have further staffing and financial implications.

Meeting venues and office accommodation

During the reporting period select and standing committees met 151 times. The number of meetings is expected to increase with the appointment of an additional standing committee (see page 30).

Table 5.1

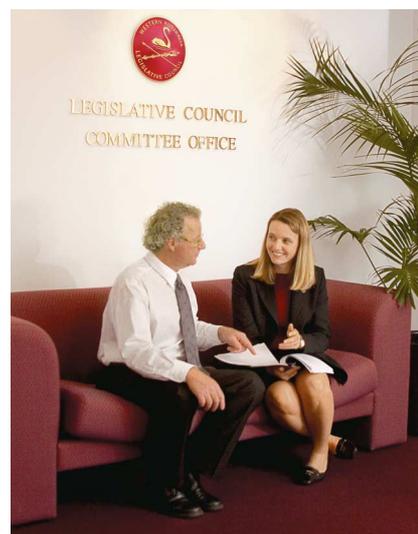
Committee Meetings 2004-05¹⁰

Key Items	DG	EP	LN	PF	UG	RS	CN	Total	Avg
No of meetings	16	21	47	33	18	16	0	151	22
No of hours	16	61.9	61.8	65.9	17.5	51.2	0	274	39

Most committee meetings and hearings were held at the Committee Office at 1110 Hay Street, West Perth. Due to a shortage of meeting rooms, committees met outside normal business hours or had to maintain strict finishing times. Office space for staff is insufficient with, in one instance, four staff sharing one room.

The Committee Office being separate from Parliament House raises several problems including:

- access to the premises and operation of building services outside normal business hours; and
- safety of Members and staff moving between Parliament House and the Committee Office.



Lobby, 1110 Hay Street

Physical separation fragments the Department although regular workgroup liaison is encouraged (see page 39).

¹⁰

Key: DG = Delegated Legislation Joint Committee; EP = Environment and Public Affairs Committee; LN = Legislation Committee; PF = Public Administration and Finance Committee; UG = Uniform Legislation and General Purposes Committee; RS = Reserves (Reserve 43131) Bill 2003 Select Committee; CN = Advocacy for Children (Appointment of a Commissioner for Children) Select Committee. **Note:** the Procedure and Privileges Committee did not meet during this reporting period and has not been included in the statistics. Both select committees did not operate for the entire year which impacts on statistics, including averages.

The shortage of Committee Office accommodation is influenced by a lack of suitable premises in close proximity to Parliament House and financial constraints. The Department is actively pursuing the matter.

Procedural and other advice

Committee staff provide procedural and other advice to committee Chairs and Members. Advice is supplemented by the Clerk or Clerk Assistant (Committees). Advice covers a wide variety of issues including parliamentary privilege, committee powers and statutory interpretation. Administrative advice is supplemented by the Executive Officer (Committees).

Committee staff and committees liaise closely with Members, government departments, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (**Ombudsman**), the Office of the Auditor General, Parliamentary Counsel's Office, State Law Publisher and the public to ensure the effective inquiry of matters and the timely presentation of reports to the House.

Review by the Chairman of Committees (Cash Report)

Between October 2004 and April 2005, the Chairman of Committees, held discussions with Members who had served as a Chair or Deputy Chair of a Council committee during the Thirty-Sixth Parliament, and reported to the House.

The Cash Report made recommendations regarding the terms of reference for committees and their operations. The Report has been referred to the Procedure and Privileges Committee and is also being addressed by the Department.

New standing committees

Since the Cash Report:

- the House has agreed to the establishment of an Estimates and Financial Operations Committee; and
- the Leader of the House has given notice of a motion to amend Standing Orders relating to committees. The motion addresses committee membership and refines terms of reference.¹¹

Committee travel

Committee travel, including site visits, is an important component of a committee's inquiry. It enables committee consideration of matters in a practical context. Travel also facilitates public access to the committee system.

During the reporting period standing committees undertook seven trips within



Water Services Subcommittee site visit in Kununnurra

¹¹ New standing committees were established on August 17 2005.

Australia. Due to budgetary constraints a select committee was prevented from travelling and no international travel was conducted. In relation to the seven trips within Australia, expenditure was:

Table 5.2

Travel Expenditure 2004-05

Committee	Intrastate	Interstate	International	Total
Delegated Legislation		\$12,721.79		\$12,721.79
Legislation		\$18,866.00		\$18,866.00
Public Administration and Finance	\$14,412.00	\$2,896.74		\$17,308.74
Uniform Legislation and General Purposes		\$2,495.77		\$2,495.77
Total	\$14,412.00	\$36,980.30		\$51,392.30

See appendix 5 for detailed costings of committee travel, including comparative statistics for the Thirty-Fourth, Thirty-Fifth and Thirty-Sixth Parliaments.

MAJOR INITIATIVES

A number of initiatives were developed or refined by the Committee Office to address practice and procedure. These endeavour to:

- assist and enhance Members' roles and contributions as committee Members and Chairs;
- increase public sector and community awareness of, and involvement in, committees;
- improve access to procedural information; and
- improve committee effectiveness.

Members' development

- ***New Members' induction:*** information sessions on committees were held at the Committee Office. The sessions were enhanced by contributions from a panel of current and former committee Members. Feedback from participants was positive and the sessions were well received.
- ***Guide to committee practice and procedure:*** this publication provides guidance for committee Members on general committee practice and procedure.
- ***Guides for specific committee practice and procedure:*** these publications provide information for committee Members on specific committees and their terms of reference.

Public Sector development

- ***Public Sector employees' guide:*** this publication provides a practical guide for Public Sector employees dealing with parliamentary committees.

- **Ministerial and departmental staff seminars:** promotion of parliamentary committees in annual seminars (see page 25).
- **Public Sector seminar program:** a public sector seminar program to increase awareness of the Council and its committees and to enhance working relationships was developed.
- **Required committee information:** committees recommended specific procedures for the provision of information by government. The Parliament Internet site was altered to highlight these requirements.

Many other initiatives occur at a committee level and are canvassed in each committee's reports. These can be viewed on the Parliament Internet site: www.parliament.wa.gov.au.

Staff development

To ensure the retention of valuable knowledge and improve services, the Committee Office developed or refined the following initiatives:

- **Induction program:** comprehensive induction program for new staff encompassing practical and procedural knowledge.
- **Operational manuals on general committee procedures:** operational manuals, procedural guidelines and precedents including: the *Legislative Council Committee Office Manual* and a *Standing Orders Commentary*.
- **Operational manual on particular committee procedures:** procedural guidelines and precedents for specific committees and their terms of reference.
- **Performance and professional development initiatives:** (see Chapter 7).
- **Workplace teams and meetings:** the Committee Office is committed to mentoring and information exchange, and the use of workplace teams. Meetings occur regularly at many operational levels.

Public awareness

Committees encourage community participation in the work of Parliament. During the reporting period:

- committees regularly stimulated public debate by calling for submissions, holding public hearings and publishing transcripts of hearings and committee reports on the Internet;
- committees conducted site visits and hearings;
- the committee system was promoted at the Regional Parliament (see page 9);
- written material on committees was provided for the Internet;
- presentations were provided to various interest groups; and

- *Work of the Legislative Council Committee Office in 2004* was published containing statistical data on the work of committees in the 2004 calendar year.

Committee reports

Major initiatives to enhance the quality of committee reports included:

- **Proofing processes:** refinement of two separate proofing processes: one at the drafting stage which focuses on content and procedural validity; and the other after sign off in preparation for printing;
- **Corporate image:** updating the design of report covers; and
- **Statutory form amendments:** assisting committees to report legislative inquiries with recommended amendments in statutory form. Advantage can then be taken of procedures in the House that provide for the adoption of committee amendments on the passing of one question.



The number of reports tabled in 2004-05 was affected by the State election (see page 8). Table 5.3 details some of the relevant statistics.

Table 5.3

Committee Reports 2004-05¹²

Reports	DG	EP	LN	PF	UG	RS	CN	Total	Avg
No of reports tabled	2	5	5	5	8	1	1	27	4
No of pages of reports tabled	38	853	704	253	491	246	117	2,702	386
No of copies of tabled reports printed	120	540	440	365	915	180	165	2,725	389
No of government responses to reports received ¹³	0	4	1	5	4	1	0	15	2

¹² **Key:** DG = Delegated Legislation Joint Committee; EP = Environment and Public Affairs Committee; LN = Legislation Committee; PF = Public Administration and Finance Committee; UG = Uniform Legislation and General Purposes Committee; RS = Reserves (Reserve 43131) Bill 2003 Select Committee; CN = Advocacy for Children (Appointment of a Commissioner for Children) Select Committee. **Note:** the Procedure and Privileges Committee did not meet during this reporting period and has not been included in the statistics. Both select committees did not operate for the entire year which impacts on statistics, including averages.

¹³ In some cases it is appropriate that more than one Minister respond to a Committee, and thus more than one response may be received for a single report. A government response is not required for reports on inquiries into bills as matters raised by the committee will be addressed by the Government when the bill is debated in the House.

Two substantial inquiries were reported:

- The Environment and Public Affairs Committee tabled its 516 page report on the Alcoa Refinery at Wagerup in October 2004. The Committee had commenced the inquiry in November 2001. It received 72 submissions and heard evidence from 33 witnesses.
- The State Administrative Tribunal Bills¹⁴ were referred to the Legislation Committee in September 2003. The Committee reported back in 443 pages in October 2004. The Committee received 48 submissions and heard evidence from 24 witnesses.

Committee Office premises

Initiatives with the premises included:

- **Tenant forums:** regular monthly meetings between the Committee Office and other tenants to discuss common issues.
- **Security upgrade:** installation of a monitored security alarm.
- **Recarpeting and wiring project:** recarpeting and installation of digital recording equipment.

LOOKING AHEAD

Area	Initiative
Committee Members' Development	<p><i>Committee Members' Guide:</i> publication of a formal Committee Members' Guide on general practice and procedure</p> <p><i>Specific Committee Guides for Members:</i> publication of formal guides for each committee on terms of reference and specific practice and procedure</p> <p><i>Committee Chairs' Forums:</i> in conjunction with the Chairman of Committees, the hosting of regular forums to improve operations</p> <p><i>Members' Briefings:</i> provision of ongoing briefings, as referred to in the Cash Report</p>
Public Sector development	<p><i>Public Sector Seminar Program:</i> further development of the program to increase awareness of the roles and function of the Council and its committees</p>

¹⁴ "The State Administrative Tribunal (Conferral of Jurisdiction) Amendment and Repeal Bill 2003 was the largest Bill ever to come before the Council, amounting to 686 pages of proposed legislation" *Work of the Legislative Council in 2004*, p5.

Area	Initiative
	<i>Government Rules for Public Sector Employees:</i> liaison with the Ministry of Premier and Cabinet to update its guidelines in relation to public sector liaison with the Parliament and its committees
Staff development	<p><i>Operational manuals and guidelines:</i> refinement of operational manuals, guidelines and precedents</p> <p><i>Specific Committee Guides for Staff:</i> publication of operational manuals, guidelines and precedents for specific committees</p> <p><i>Consultants and secondments:</i> investigation of the use of specialist and consultant contract advisers, including public sector secondments</p>
Public awareness	<p><i>Review of operational procedures and publications:</i> continuation of the review of operational procedures and documents to enhance public awareness</p> <p><i>Education Office Liason:</i> to increase awareness of the roles of the Council and its committees</p> <p><i>Government responses to committee reports:</i> to include in the Notice Paper the due date for a government response</p> <p><i>Publication of committee hearings:</i> publication of dates and times in newspapers</p>
Parliamentary Officers	Foster links with the Office of the Auditor General, the Ombudsman and other Parliamentary Officers
Meeting venues and office accommodation	Funding for appropriate office space and refurbishment
Style Guide	Publication of a formal style guide for reports
Fire detection	Funding to install fire detection equipment

CHAPTER 6 INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Council works in conjunction with other departments and units of the Parliament in relation to information technology (IT) and records management.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Upgrades

Over the reporting period:

- Windows XP was installed, replacing Windows 2000;
- Lotus Notes was upgraded to Version 6; and
- Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint) was upgraded to Version 2003.

The Department worked with IT in order to resolve issues with templates and macros affected by the upgrades.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Current status

The Department has operated a file management system since 1987 based on Access, to record files and their location. This system has become obsolete and is now inadequate for current needs. Requirements of the *State Records Act 2000* led to a review of the Department's records management practices and systems.

Records Management Committee

The Council initiated the appointment of a Parliamentary Records Management Committee on February 22 2005 in order to address records management from a 'whole of Parliament' approach.

The Committee will encourage and provide for a co-ordinated approach to all matters relating to record keeping. These include: archiving, file naming conventions, parliamentary thesaurus, retention and disposal schedules, Electronic Document/Records Management Systems (EDRMS) and microfiche.

Record keeping plan compliance

A draft Record Keeping Plan, as required by the *State Records Act 2000*, was developed and submitted to the President in November 2002. This is due for review in November 2007. The

Department is currently working with other departments to develop new file naming conventions and retention and disposal schedules, with a view to implementing an EDRMS.

LOOKING AHEAD

Area	Initiative
Records management	Consideration of key recommendations made by the Parliamentary Records Management Committee
Department statistics	Development of databases for the collation of Procedure Office and Committee Office statistics
Document automation	Continuing development including templates and macros
Document database	Design of a database to manage committee inquiry documents

CHAPTER 7 HUMAN RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

The Department is a knowledge based organisation whose greatest asset is its staff. The Department assists staff to develop high professional standards through training and mentoring.

The Human Resources Unit of PSD offers support and advice in areas including recruitment, induction, training, performance development and review. (See appendix 6 for statistics in relation to staff of the Department.)

DEPARTMENTAL STAFF

Flexible work practices

The Department supports flexible work practices where they can be accommodated. During the reporting period:

- two staff worked from home one day per week each;
- five staff worked part time;
- two staff purchased leave via the 44/52 (or less) arrangement;
- leave without pay was granted on an ad hoc basis during non-sitting times;
- one staff member commenced 12 months of unpaid maternity leave; and
- one staff member was seconded to the Ombudsman's office (see 'Secondments' below).

The Department uses electronic tools to facilitate work outside of the office.

Performance Development and Review, and Training Needs Analysis

The Department has initiated voluntary staff performance reviews with the object of identifying training needs and obtaining feedback for improving services. Reviews occur on an annual and six monthly bases.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the unique parliamentary environment training is a high priority. Within its limited budget, the Department must provide ongoing professional development while maintaining support for the House and its committees. Major initiatives included:

- **Interdepartmental liaison:** Regular meetings between the Committee Office and the Procedure Office. Meetings have also been held with the Assembly

Committee Office and Hansard¹⁵ to improve communication and work practices.

- **Committee Office seminar series:** There are limited external training providers in parliamentary practice and law. The Committee Office has developed and operates an in-house seminar program for staff with two main streams: *Standing Orders*, and *Professional Development*. Committee Office staff prepare and present the sessions and invitations are extended to other parliamentary staff.
- **Conferences and courses:** Staff attend seminars conducted by the Institute of Public Administration Australia, Law Society, Australian Institute of Administrative Law and the Australasian Study of Parliament Group as the opportunity arises. Committee staff attend conferences relevant to a committee's practice area. Clerks attend conferences held by the Presiding Officers and Clerks' Association, Australian and New Zealand Association of Clerks-at-the-Table and the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table.
- **Report 'At the House':** To facilitate links between the House and the Committee Office, each evening Table Officers publish a report on matters of interest relevant to each committee and wider matters of practice and procedure for Committee Office staff.
- **Secondments:** A number of secondments have been undertaken this year. In January to March 2005, an Advisory Officer (Legal) spent nine weeks seconded to the Ombudsman's office. In February 2005 the Clerk Assistant (Committees) spent a week attached to the New Zealand Parliament.

WORK EXPERIENCE AND ARTICLED CLERK PROGRAM

The Department supports Articled Clerks and work experience students. The experience is mutually beneficial as it:

- provides a generalist or legal research resource for the Department;
- increases community knowledge of the operation of the Council and its committees; and
- creates a future pool of applicants for the Department.

Articled Clerk Program

Since 1999 the Western Australian Legal Practice Board has granted approval to the Committee Office to provide six months of a required 12 month Law Articles program for law graduates. To date, the Committee Office has employed 11 Articled Clerks including one during this reporting period.

¹⁵ During the reporting period a workplace team was formed between Hansard and the Committee Office to update and document procedures for producing a transcript and monitoring hearings.

Work experience

During 2005 the Department provided work experience opportunities to three students.

CLASSIFICATION COMMITTEE

The four-member Classification Committee includes one Department management representative. The BIPERS process is used for classifying new and reclassifying old positions across Parliament.

LOOKING AHEAD

Area	Initiative
Courses and conferences	The involvement of staff in external seminars and other activities including those conducted by the Australian and New Zealand Clerks-at-the-Table
Secondments	To further secondment opportunities with other Parliaments and the Public Sector
Performance Development and Review	Continuing annual and six monthly reviews of staff performance and feedback
Training opportunities	<p><i>Training needs analysis:</i> continuing use of the training needs analysis process</p> <p><i>Table duties at the House:</i> training of selected officers in Table duties</p>
Staffing	Funding to increase staff numbers to appropriate levels

CHAPTER 8 FINANCIAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Clerk is responsible for keeping proper accounts and maintaining adequate systems of internal control, preparing financial statements, and complying with the *Financial Administration and Audit Act 1985*.

The financial statements consist of the Statement of Financial Performance, Statement of Financial Position, Statements of Cash Flows, Summary of Consolidated Fund Appropriations and Revenue and Estimates, and the Notes to the Financial Statements (see appendix 7).

Management of the Department's financial responsibilities is supported by the Finance Unit of PSD (**Finance**). Finance, in partnership with the Clerk, provides the following services:

- management of the budgeting and financial reporting functions;
- administration of Members' salaries and allowances;
- strategic commercial and financial advice to ensure efficient and effective use of allocated resources;
- maintenance of financial systems and internal controls; and
- preparation of management reports and statutory financial statements.

FINANCIAL POSITION

There has been a significant decline over several years to the funds provided to the Council for its operational activities. The net decline since 1999-2000 was 8% in real terms. This has adversely affected some aspects of the services provided to Members of Parliament and has resulted in limited opportunities for extensive research.

Figure 8.1

Operational Expenditure (Real Decrease since 1999-2000)

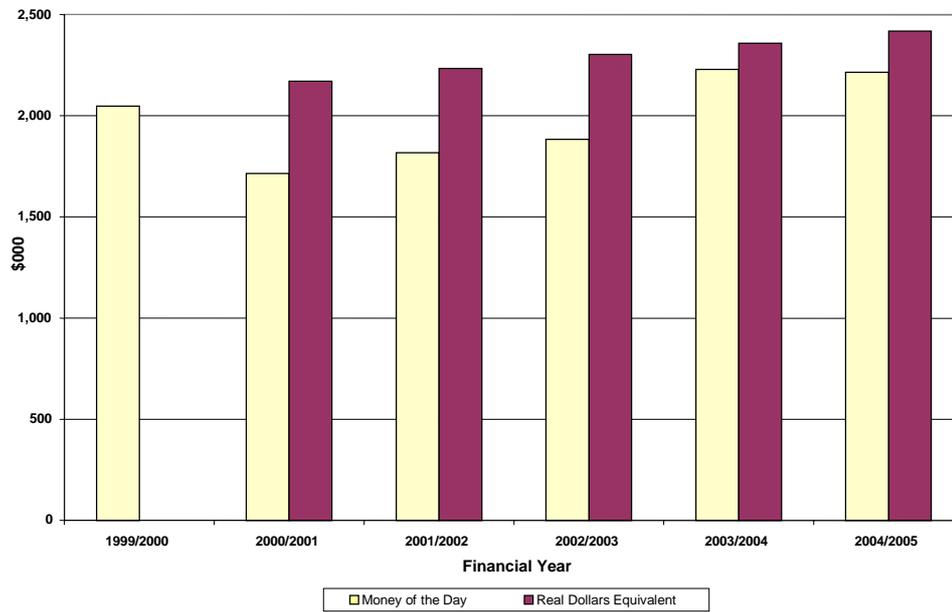
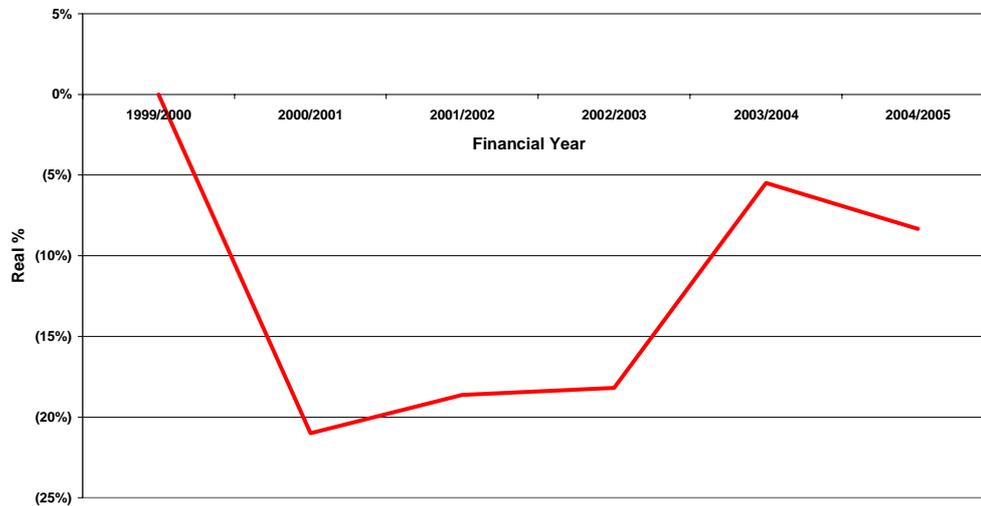


Figure 8.2

Real Decrease in Operational Budget 1999-2000 to 2004-05



The total cost of services exceeded revenues received by \$20,000 in 2004-05, as indicated in the Statement of Financial Performance.

Of the total amount expended of \$14.421 million, \$7.251 million related primarily to Members' salaries and allowances which are funded through Special Acts¹⁶. An amount of \$4.970 million related to the Council's arbitrary component of the costs of the PSD apportioned on the number of Members of Parliament.

The actual cost of running the House and its committees was \$2 million, a reduction of \$250,000 from the previous year after taking into consideration the one-off cost associated with holding a Regional Parliament during 2004-05.

There was a 17% reduction in the total assets of the Council, primarily made up of reduced cash balances that were required to meet ongoing commitments.

Finance will be working closely with the Financial and Risk Management Team to address the operational budget constraints.

LOOKING AHEAD

Area	Initiative
Operational Budget	To pursue an appropriate level of funding necessary to deliver the services required by the Department

¹⁶ *Salaries and Allowances Act 1975.*

