

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
Monday, 2 August 2021
ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Chair:

Mr P.A. Treloar

Members:

Hon. G.G. Brock
Mr D.R. Cregan
Dr R.M. Harvey
Ms A. Michaels
Mr A.S. Pederick
Mr C.J. Picton

The committee met at 13:00

Estimates Vote

COURTS ADMINISTRATION AUTHORITY, \$96,600,000

Minister:

Hon. V.A. Chapman, Deputy Premier, Attorney-General, Minister for Planning and Local Government.

Departmental Advisers:

Hon. C. Kourakis, Chief Justice, Courts Administration Authority.

Ms P. Croser, State Courts Administrator, Courts Administration Authority.

Ms L. South, Executive Director, Corporate Services, Courts Administration Authority.

Mr C. Black, Finance Manager, Courts Administration Authority.

The CHAIR: Welcome back, everybody, on a Monday to Estimates Committee A. I can advise that committee member the member for West Torrens has been discharged and the member for Kaurna has joined us. The member for Davenport has been discharged and the member for Newland has joined us. The member for Taylor has been discharged and the member for Enfield has joined us. I will make a brief opening statement.

The estimates committees are a relatively informal procedure and, as such, there is no need to stand to ask or answer questions. I understand that the minister and the lead speaker for the opposition have agreed an approximate time for the consideration of proposed payments. Can the minister and lead speaker for the opposition please confirm that the timetable for today's proceedings is accurate?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Yes, sir.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Attorney.

Mr PICTON: I believe so. I do not think I have any choice, though.

The CHAIR: No—well, as long as you have confirmed that earlier. I am sure it was agreed upon.

Mr PICTON: It was agreed amongst the government.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I just confirm that there has been no change since the abortion of the proceedings as a result of the COVID lockdown. This is exactly the same timetable.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Attorney, and member for Kaurua. I am up to just point 2 of my opening remarks. I will continue.

Changes to committee membership will be notified as they occur, and I have already done such today. If the minister undertakes to supply information at a later date, it must be submitted to the Clerk Assistant via the Answers to Questions mailbox no later than Friday 24 September 2021.

I propose to allow both the minister and the lead speaker of the opposition to make opening statements of about 10 minutes, should they wish. There will be a flexible approach to giving the call for asking questions. A member who is not on the committee may ask a question at the discretion of the Chair.

All questions are to be directed to the minister, not the minister's advisers. The minister may refer questions to advisers for a response. Questions must be based on lines of expenditure in the budget papers and must be identifiable or referenced. Members unable to complete their questions during the proceedings may submit them as questions on notice for inclusion in the assembly *Notice Paper*.

I remind members that the rules of debate in the house apply in committee. Consistent with the rules of the house, photography by members from the chamber floor is not permitted while the committee is sitting. Ministers and members may not table documents before the committee; however, documents can be supplied to the Chair for distribution. Statistical information of up to one page in length may be inserted in *Hansard*.

The committee's examinations will be broadcast in the same manner as sittings of the house, via the IPTV network, parliament website and video-on-demand service. I am going to make a comment relating to masks: I suggest that members of the committee wear masks unless they are asking or answering questions.

I now proceed to open the following line for examination. The portfolio is the Courts Administration Authority. The minister appearing is the Attorney-General. I declare the proposed payments open for examination. I call on the Attorney to introduce her advisers and make a statement, should she wish.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Thank you, Mr Chair. To members of the committee, may I firstly indicate that I appear here for this portion of the estimates as the Attorney-General. To my right, I am pleased to have Chief Justice Mr Chris Kourakis also present. As members would be aware, under the Courts Administration Act the Chief Justice, as chair of the courts council, is the administrative head of the South Australian courts.

Behind me, to my right, is Ms Penny Croser, who is the relatively newly appointed State Courts Administrator, and we welcome her here to her first estimates and thank her for undertaking this role. Ms Linda South, who is directly behind me, is the Executive Director of Corporate Services, and Mr Chris Black is our money man as finance manager of the CAA.

I briefly indicate in opening that we have had another difficult year living with COVID-19 in South Australia, and I wish to place on the record my appreciation to the Chief Justice and all members of the judiciary and Courts Administration Authority for their extraordinary work during this time to keep those services available to the public. There has been, as with many areas of industry and public administration, the need to be flexible and undertake tasks. For our state courts, one of the most challenging has been the continued public interface with a number of the clients, witnesses and parties involved in court proceedings, and with that of course trials bring another level of challenge.

I would have to say that of all the administrative provisions, not directly in the Courts Administration Authority but in relation to the administration of justice, His Honour's member of his court Justice Judy Hughes, as Justice of the Supreme Court, heads SACAT (South Australian Civil and Administrative Tribunal). I would have to say that probably of all the parties that are

providing services in this regard they have been able to maintain, almost without interruption, a continuous service, and I make a special acknowledgement of her.

I do not mean in any way to diminish the services of the other courts, because they have had added and different challenges, but I thank all those involved and the many hundreds of staff who are employed in the Courts Administration Authority to undertake that role. With that, I am happy to answer any questions of the committee.

The CHAIR: Does the lead speaker of the opposition wish to make any opening remarks, member for Kaurna?

Mr PICTON: No, other than to welcome the Chief Justice to again lower himself to our level of sitting through our estimates.

The CHAIR: I am sure he is pleased to be here, member for Kaurna.

Mr PICTON: I am sure. I am happy proceed to questions. I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 130, which refers to the criminal jurisdiction of the Courts Administration Authority. I note that it says quite explicitly in the document that the reduction in expenditure is partly attributable this coming year to targeted savings strategies of \$2.1 million, which are otherwise known as budget cuts of \$2.1 million. How is the proper administration of justice supported by those \$2.1 million of budget cuts referred to in the budget papers?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Could I start by asking the Chief Justice and/or our finance representative to outline to you the targeted savings strategies they have implemented.

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: I can say that primarily the reductions will be affected by reductions in staff. The total measures there are about \$1.3 million. I have not worked out exactly the FTEs; I think they are somewhere around a dozen, maybe a bit more, maybe a bit under. Some of those we hope will not affect services because they have been enabled by the Electronic Court Management System, which has already been introduced for civil and will go live for criminal in February. The constraints, though, on our budget mean that, as with all budgets, savings that will be made there will not be able to be used to improve services; as you can see, most of it is coming from staff.

There is an anticipated saving of \$200,000 in juror costs by reducing circuits. We cannot be certain of that. We have had a reduction in juror costs for circuits because of COVID disruptions. The District Court does most of those, so there would be some level of doubt about whether we effect that saving and, if we do not, it will have to be found elsewhere.

The other major cut is \$300,000 in CPI withdrawals, which has just been allocated pro rata across all cost centres. That will have an effect. Goods and services are down by \$136,000, \$50,000 of that in IT hardware, which is a concern because we are going to a full electronic model, but hopefully we can manage that by being frugal and sensible about those things. There is an internal audit reduction of \$25,000, but we have a strong internal audit function chaired by an independent forensic accountant, so that should be fine.

There is a \$50,000 reduction in intervention services. That is to do with our special courts that provide support for people on the drug program, mental health program or domestic violence program, but those cuts should not affect services. If in other areas the savings strategies are not met or if we have cost pressures—and we will certainly have cost pressures—we may need to look at other cuts in intervention services and across the board. In summary, that is where the reductions are being made.

Membership:

Mr Brown substituted for Ms Wortley.

Mr PICTON: The Chief Justice mentioned a reduction in staff of \$1.3 million. Do you have a breakdown of what staff positions they will be?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: It varies from senior management. Some of it is part of management restructure. For quite some years now we have been flattening our management structure, and that will continue. So some is there and some reductions are in registry staff. That is the area where the ECMS hopefully will mean that will not be affecting services.

There is a reduction in some court transcription and our facilities officer. Court transcription will just be natural attrition; they are a very valuable part of our workforce. As it turns out, one of our facilities officers is required on a special project planning for future court buildings, so she will be with us, but she will be paid out of another budget line for that.

Mr PICTON: The budget papers show estimated result to the FTEs of 428 reducing down to 387. You mentioned about a dozen or so, but that seems to suggest a reduction of 41 staff.

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: We were at 686 FTEs down to 609, but it will not be that level of reduction because we will have a carryover for about 40 staff working on the Electronic Court Management System (ECMS). We had anticipated that that would be finished by now, which is why there was an expected reduction, but we had a surplus in our operating budget for this year and we have carried that over to support the ECMS employees until the job is finished, as I said, sometime after go live in perhaps about March next year. But I am not sure about the 400 figure.

Mr PICTON: This was just in the criminal jurisdiction sub-program.

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: Sorry, that is a breakdown. That is part of the 600, and I cannot tell you how that particularly breaks down.

Mr PICTON: Is it possible to take that on notice?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: Yes, it is.

Mr PICTON: In terms of the circuit courts and reducing the circuits, you mentioned \$200,000. What is the impact of that? Where are those circuits being reduced across the state?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: This is based on assumptions as to what has been happening over the last year. That is what I meant when I said that we cannot be certain about this saving. If there is a demand and waiting lists and backlogs increase, then that money will have to go back in. If we do not find money elsewhere and the demand for those circuits is there and we have to put circuit courts out with jurors, then either there will still have to be a backlog and waiting time or else we have to cut elsewhere.

Mr PICTON: So this is reflective of what has happened over the past year in terms of circuits?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: The estimate is to us thinking that we can make a saving that is based on what we have seen, numbers being committed and the like. I cannot drill down as to exactly how that estimate was made.

Mr PICTON: Over the past year, what has been the reduction in circuits that has happened?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: I cannot tell you; I will have to take it on notice. That would be part of the working formula that went into the \$200,000.

Mr PICTON: Where is the \$50,000 for the intervention services going to come from?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: Sorry, I said that was circuits. It is not just circuits; it is all courts.

Mr PICTON: So where is the \$50,000 for intervention services coming from specifically?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: That would be mostly a saving found with our external providers, I think. I am not sure about that. That is in our contracting arrangement with external providers of services, whether it is a counselling program or a urine testing program, that sort of thing. Yes, I have a nod that it is that sort of saving.

Mr PICTON: The intervention programs will continue, but you would be reducing the amount of counselling or testing—

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: Yes, or we have managed to negotiate a better price for it with an external provider.

Mr PICTON: Has that negotiation started?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: Yes, and from looking at contracts and expected usage and the like, that is an estimate of what we think we can save. There are other options to make bigger savings, if they are necessary, but that would result in reductions in programs or numbers of participants in programs.

Mr PICTON: If you do not have it with you, perhaps you could take on notice whether there is any breakdown of what you are expecting that \$50,000 to be down from?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: We can take that on notice, yes.

Mr PICTON: You mentioned that if there are cost pressures, which almost certainly there are going to be, there will be additional need to look at that budget.

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: Yes. One of the cost pressures will be—and it will not be surprising to some members here—to improve our leadership and our leadership training, and we may need to recruit for that and have money for programs.

Mr PICTON: So there would be an additional impact upon those intervention services, if that occurred.

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: We will have to find the money somewhere. I suppose the only point I am making is that we looked at these programs to make the savings we have, to meet the cut we have to meet this year, and obviously we look at them to see if there is anything further we can live with—there is no fat but anything further we can live with—to meet the cost pressures, like the one I just mentioned.

Mr PICTON: Is the Courts Administration Authority not worried that if you start reducing the expenditure on things like counselling or testing that is going to have a broader societal impact, particularly when we know the pressure on these areas?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: There is enormous concern about that, especially amongst the magistrates—and they are primarily magistrates almost exclusively who run those programs—who tell me constantly of the lives that they have seen change around because of involvement in those programs. I think that is very important.

There is another point or issue I have agitated from time to time and that is, even though those externally provided services like counselling and programs and the like are important in effecting that change, as well as the close management of the individuals by the magistrates who see them regularly come back, whether that is core work for the courts and whether we should really have a split in the provision of community correctional services, which is in effect what is happening now, with the Department for Correctional Services providing Community Corrections supervision and programs post sentence, and the Courts Administration Authority providing really programs—not supervision—before sentence.

I have wondered whether there would be some improvement in service and efficiency if there were not a split. Others, especially the magistrates who run the programs, are really keen for the Courts Administration Authority to maintain it because they fear a dilution of services if it goes into another department. But that is an all of government, or at least across both of those departments that someone has to look at that. We cannot effect any change like that from within ourselves.

Mr PICTON: Is it not a risk that if you cut a small amount of money from some of these counselling and other programs it can lead to a worse result and end up costing more in Supreme Court trials if offences get worse down the track?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: That is right. That is what is often said. I have not seen any recent economic modelling of that. I am sure it is possible. The other thing that I have often agitated, and I am happy to get some air space for it now, is a concern that nationally there has not been a review of the multiplicity of programs all over the country to assess the effectiveness of one program

against the other so that we can identify best practice and not so good practice and start to improve around the country.

I have certainly not seen that sort of economic modelling. Intuitively I share that view, but I have not seen it economically modelled. Even if you accept that, there is still an argument about whether you are targeting the right people with these programs and whether, for example, it might be better to put fewer people through them by better targeting but provide a better service.

By better targeting, I mean this: there are some people who it will not change at all—why spend the money on them if you find a way of predicting it—and there are some people who are about to change their lives anyway without that intervention. How you pick them is the big problem.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: To date, if I could just add to the Chief Justice's contribution in this regard, the intervention programs that have operated in the time I have been in the parliament are ones that have been maintained, and they have been maintained within the structure of there being a dedicated provision for this via the CAA rather than the Department for Correctional Services.

To date, I certainly, as Attorney-General, have not received any request for a transfer of the funding to come via a different department, whether it is the Department for Correctional Services or otherwise, but I have no doubt that the Chief Justice is much more capable of keeping an eye on that money, rather than if it was coming from another department, so that may be the major motivation for not.

To date, I have not, but of course should the Chief Justice or the council want to put to us that there be a transfer of that funding to be financed via the Department for Correctional Services or any other department, we are happy to look at it.

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: I asked the Chief Magistrate to speak with people from the Department for Correctional Services about these possibilities at a time when I was worried that we would have to make a bigger cut, and if we were going to make a bigger cut to intervention programs hoping that we might be able to save something by some efficiencies across the areas. The report I have back is that it looks difficult for everyone and there is not a lot of enthusiasm, but that will have to be revisited. That might have to be revisited if the cost pressures or the assumptions about savings in other areas do not come to fruition.

Mr PICTON: Given what has been articulated in terms of the importance of these programs, why has that been an area that has been targeted for those budget savings?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: Because it is not core for us. Community Corrections is not core court work. This was an innovation and an extension on court work, and there is some very strong adherence on the advantages of what are called therapeutic courts. Intuitively, again, I feel that and see that. I have not seen a lot of analysis of it. I think we would all benefit from that, but from my perspective I look at it that, because it is not core work, it is not measured.

We are going to be hit around the head for delays and in matters like that no-one is going to say, 'Ah, but we are waiting and we've got defendants in custody or on bail and victims waiting for their matters to be finalised,' but we have actually rehabilitated a few people, which I cannot number. That is where I come from as the Chair of the Courts Administration Council worried about budget reductions and why I look at intervention programs.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Before the member goes on, I might add that there is another intervention service that is offered in this area. It was introduced and is under the direction of Judge Eldridge, who is the head of the Youth Court in South Australia. She introduced a reunification court, as she describes it, which is designed as—this is my description now—an intensive opportunity for her to meet with members of the department in relation to child welfare and protection and also the parties, who are usually one or more of the parents or other kinship members, with the view to dealing with the reunification of families in child protection matters.

It is a matter that she indicated to me she has had operating in the last couple of years or so. Last time we met, she was proposing to undertake a review of it. She indicated her confidence in the importance of this work, and as a government and the minister responsible for this I have been very supportive of her continuing that program to enable her to see whether that can add some benefit in relation to children in that aspect of her court matters.

The Chief Justice has indicated that perhaps it is time for us to have some national review of what is best practice in these intervention courts or programs. To the best of my knowledge, I do not think there has been a review of them. There are matters I discussed with former Attorney-General Atkinson some years ago, as to whether he was going to undertake any review of them. At the time that was discussed, we were considering a juvenile justice review of this parliament.

In any event, on balance and unless we hear otherwise from the court, if all these reports and reviews indicate that in some way these programs are not meritorious or need to be substantially improved, of course we would support the court in their work in this regard.

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: Can I make a couple of observations. I do not think that Judge Eldridge's program has an external provider of services and it is not, for that reason, an expensive program. What it does need, though, is a legislative foundation. Already the Supreme Court has seen applications to set aside orders made in court because of the judge's involvement in this informal mediation process where consensus is attempted. A legislative foundation for that work, which Judge Eldridge says has been successful, is really needed.

Secondly, on the evaluation of the programs, we have had internal evaluations of just the program, looking at what it is doing in this state. My interest is in having them evaluated against interstate examples because otherwise it is very difficult for someone externally to really understand what they are seeing in the figures and to evaluate them. If you compare what is happening interstate, you will get a better understanding of whether things are working in this state or not.

Mr PICTON: For the uninitiated, such as myself, what is under the banner of these intervention programs? Drug diversion was mentioned. What are the different programs?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: There are two drug programs—a longer one and a shorter one. I think it is the longer one that the magistrates are keen to maintain. There is a mental health program or therapeutic court. There is often a lot of overlap between the two. There is domestic violence and there are the Aboriginal sentencing courts.

Mr PICTON: Obviously, they are all quite large priorities for society to improve our performance, but I guess what the Courts Administration Authority is saying is, 'Well, we have to do our core business. If the government wants to do these other things, the government can give us money to do that.' Is that essentially—

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: They are not saying that at the moment. The view of the magistrates who think they are really important is prevailing. I am just—

Mr PICTON: But there is a reduction in expenditure.

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: Yes, there has been and this is fairly small compared with what we did a few years ago when we reduced them even more. I am just saying that, if it comes to the crunch, I am going to have to look after core business and I will be talking about those sorts of reductions, but we are not talking about them at the moment. If we do have to relook at them, the first thing we are going to do is to try to work out how we can reduce money but maintain more targeted services that are needed.

Mr PICTON: Is it possible to get on notice a breakdown of the expenditure and contracts under those programs?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: Yes.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Can I just indicate that, yes, I approved most of those, and I will take that on notice.

Mr PICTON: Thank you, Attorney. In relation to the court reduction in expenditure that happened over the past year, has there been a reduction in terms of physically present services in the APY lands?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: There have been reductions in circuits because of COVID. As it turns out, we have made a saving, I think, because we have not been able to go there, but it is not that we decided not to go there because it is too expensive. There was a reduction in service, so I

imagine the delays in having matters finalised there have increased even beyond what I saw when I went there, I think it was, probably in 2019.

Mr PICTON: Is it fair to say that courts have not been there since the beginning of the pandemic at the start of 2020?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: There has been an attempt to go there—at least one—but it was called short for non-COVID related reasons. I cannot remember now exactly what it was, but something came up.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: For the benefit of the committee, I will just add that after March 2020 when it became clear that there would be coronavirus matters that would require our attention, at that stage, I think, nine of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands within South Australia were placed under Biosecurity Act rules. I see one of the members of the committee nodding because he would be familiar with this. The APY lands, I think, were one of the first. At their request, the commonwealth acted under the Biosecurity Act to restrict all personnel going in and out of the lands. It was not without exception but—

Mr PICTON: It stopped for some time, though.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am talking about March 2020.

Mr PICTON: Yes, but since then.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: That act prevailed and has operated in relation to it. Each of the lands that came under that scrutiny or that restriction was at the request of those communities. I think it is fair to say that there was a very large concern—certainly Australia-wide; I am not sure internationally—that our Indigenous communities would be at serious risk if the coronavirus were to take hold in those communities, and they acted themselves to ensure protection against that as best they could. Similarly, there were concerns in any other areas of close living such as our prisons, but certainly the Indigenous lands were an area of high risk. As a state administration, of course, we respect that, and I thank the Chief Justice for also acknowledging the significance of ensuring that we respected that.

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: I was wrong. The last one we attempted was cancelled because of COVID, so I assume it was the recent scare.

Mr PICTON: Is there a plan to go back in the future?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: Yes, there are a number of circuits there—I think there are probably around six or seven a year—so we will go back. Can I say, we have been trying for years now to get better AVL links to deal with matters in the lands. It is not to replace it. A presence for the courts in the lands is important. In fact, I think there should be a court building perhaps at Umuwa, which is sort of the administrative centre there. At the moment, the courts go and sit in the community centres. They are generally made available to the courts. I do not think they have to be, but they are made available.

Because it is a community centre, it is really difficult to remand someone in custody, because the police are there but the police station is quite some way away. You cannot just lead someone in through a door into a cell, so what they will tend to do if they think someone is going to be sentenced or remanded in custody is adjourn the matter to Coober Pedy. The defendant knows what is going to happen and why it is being adjourned to Coober Pedy. It is not a very satisfactory state of affairs.

On the AVL (audiovisual) connection, they have 4G there, which will support a Webex connection, but what we need are officers in the community who can round people up and set up the link. The idea of this is not necessarily to have the court hearing but to have them speak to the lawyers, have the lawyers speaking to them whilst they are negotiating with the police for a negotiated compromise, because there is hardly ever a trial up there.

Most of them end up being guilty pleas on a negotiated basis, but what happens is the circuit goes up there and the lawyers go up there for the first time and they try to get instructions to finalise the matter. If they cannot negotiate it in time, it is adjourned off for the next circuit in a month or two months' time, and the same thing happens and you have a list of really old matters up there.

Membership:

Mr Whetstone substituted for Mr Pederick.

Mr PICTON: There was discussion about the CAA's cost pressures. One of those, surely, is the additional work, which is welcome, from Operation Ironside. I wonder if there is an estimate in terms of what those cost pressures are.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I will provide some information to the committee in relation to Operation Ironside. As most would be aware, from time to time there are some very big cases that come to the attention of our courts, and they place some extra area of responsibility and cost on a number of our agencies. I indicate, firstly, to the committee the significance of taking on some assessment of what that is going to involve.

In this case, we have multiple arrests in relation to serious criminal charges, from murder across to significant drug offences. Earlier this month, as members would probably be aware from media reports, there were police raids across the state; in fact, it is clear that they were across the country and, indeed, traversed other countries. So it was a big operation and has been tagged Operation Ironside.

It is expected that nearly all of our criminal justice system—agencies from SA Police, the Office of the DPP, the Legal Services Commission, the Courts Administration Authority and the Department for Correctional Services—will be affected in some way. Already, as members would have seen, South Australia Police were involved in arrests. A number of those arrested are held in custody for which bail has not been granted or sought and they are placed across our corrections system at present. There has been an extra workload for the Adelaide Magistrates Court and the Legal Services Commission. As I understand it, all of those have introduced some pressure.

I have asked all the agencies, including those and Forensic Science SA, in whatever part they may play in relation to any forensics—and there certainly are discussions, as I understand it, underway at the national level—to look at expert and forensic support in relation to this particular tranche of cases and, in addition to that, invited other agencies to look at some matters. Already, I have received an indication from the DPP office of extra resources that may be required. He is working on a proposal.

I have also received an indication and request from Chief Judge Evans of the District Court for some support that he would like to have in relation to associates to judges who may be involved in this matter. Each is starting to have a look at a number of these. Obviously, ultimately, whatever the Courts Administration Authority may require, we will look to the Chief Justice and his team to provide a summary of that.

As some members of the committee would be aware, we are probably a long way from a number of these cases being concluded. These are very serious charges. It may be many months, possibly years, before they are concluded, and a lot happens between now and then. Some, you would have seen from media reports, have already been concluded and I think have been referred for sentencing. Again, that takes up court time in the superior courts. These are all matters that will need to be assessed.

There are certainly a number of agencies in the criminal justice system that have already incurred cost and will need to incur further cost. The extent of that is still yet to be fully determined, but as a government I am advised from Treasury that obviously we have some provision for exceptional cases. Already I deal with this as Attorney-General in relation sometimes to people having extra legal representation, things of that nature, but in relation to big cases sometimes a very much different approach needs to be taken, and as Attorney-General I will be expected to present a case to our Treasury in due course as to what else we might need to facilitate that.

Sometimes it may be something as simple as the cost of fitting out a court facility to deal with large cases and/or large numbers of defendants. The Chief Justice is already dealing with a very significant case in relation to multiple accused in a murder case. Again, these produce extraordinary

circumstances, and sometimes infrastructure is required to be able to accommodate those types of cases.

I have made a statement publicly, and I will confirm to this committee, that the government understands that in circumstances where these cases are forthcoming, we as a government will need to look at a number of agencies having support to be able to properly administer their obligations in relation to these matters, and that includes Operation Ironside. I will defer to the Chief Justice if he would like to add anything further.

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: I have written to the Attorney and asked the Attorney's office to convene a meeting of those justice agencies that will be involved, so the Courts Administration Authority through the State Courts Administrator, DPP and the Legal Services Commission. The Attorney is right: it is early stages yet, but in my view as soon as possible all the agencies should have some insight or line of sight into what is coming down the conduit, so I hope that that meeting will be convened in the not too distant future because you have to plan for things like that.

The Attorney mentioned the eight accused's (I think it is) trial connected with the killing in a panelbeater's shop, which has organised motorcycle gang involvement. That is not set until April, but there are many pre-trial hearings that have to be heard and determined to ensure it runs smoothly in April. We have started with those, in effect, and there will be two weeks of hearings in October, so that gives you an idea of the lead time. It may well be that the DPP files directly in our court.

But even before then we have had something like a dozen applications to freeze proceeds of crime. They have been dealt with, and are dealt with fairly quickly in chambers, but what happens next is that the accused whose assets have been frozen seek hearings on whether in fact they are their assets or somebody else's assets, seek hearings to allow money to be released for living and/or legal representation. We have to find judges to hear those matters now, and they will compete with those cases, ordinary civil cases, that are waiting to be heard.

Mr PICTON: Has there been an estimate done by the Courts Administration Authority on what additional resources will be needed, and does that include additional magistrates or justices of any of the courts?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: Back of the envelope and worries in the minds of heads of jurisdiction are there, but until we get good information from the director about where these things are going it is hard to be definitive.

Mr PICTON: What is the risk if there are not the resources needed? What would happen if you do see these cases come with the current set of resources?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Could I just indicate to the committee—and I hope I have made this clear, but I will make it clear again—the government understands its responsibility, and I have given assurance that we understand that responsibility. It is expected that, unless there was the unusual circumstance of there being a mass submission of pleas of guilty on these matters, there will be considerable extra expense, and it will relate to a number of agencies.

As the Chief Justice has said, a working party will ultimately convene to work through that on the understanding that there may need to be other resources presented. The process, I am advised, is that it may then be appropriate that I present a submission to the Treasurer. This is not unheard of in relation to the extraordinary events of a matter such as this. I think the only other one I can recall, where there were multimillions of dollars allocated, in the time I have been here in the parliament and in the time when I was sitting in the place where I think the member for Enfield is now seated was when I was asking questions about extra money that had been allocated for the Snowtown murder cases, in which there were multiple defendants and multiple victims.

These things are of course extraordinary circumstances. They have a process to follow and that is being undertaken. I just want to assure the committee that it is the government's intention to make sure that we listen to the agencies that provide these services and, where necessary, that we make that extra provision. That includes security in courts, etc. I hope that is clear.

The Hon. G.G. BROCK: I have a question on Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 127. Minister, under your key agency outputs, one of them is to 'foster an environment in which the judicial

officers, staff and volunteers can contribute to effective performance of the court system'. Could you please elaborate on that and how it is working?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: It is a very broad question, but I will try to target it in relation to the area that I think the member is interested in and the particular staff—

The Hon. G.G. BROCK: To the Sheriff's Office and the Courts Administration Authority.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I will just make a preliminary statement in relation to that. I appreciate the member's interest in this area and his involvement in relation to the parliamentary committee. I think the Courts Administration Authority employs something like 160-odd members of staff, some part time, in the Sheriff's Office. So it is an important part of the service provision to our courts provided by these officers. It includes the security in courts, security for judicial officers and other staff in the precincts of the court, and indeed the victims, witnesses, etc.

It also has another role in relation to the execution of service of documents and various other responsibilities on behalf of the court, so it plays an important role in that regard. There are significant recommendations that have been presented from the committee of the parliament, which the member is familiar with. From memory, there were seven; I will just try to find them as I look here for reference to that. I am just stuck here on the Sheriff's Office regional security, which of course the member is aware of having extra service provided up there last year in the budget.

If I come back to the committee, largely there was a tranche of recommendations that talked about referring this matter to the corrections department for employment of the Sheriff's Office, taking it away from the CAA and going to Corrections. Those recommendations were not accepted, but it was pointed out in the response that the government presented on that that each of the employees, as in the Sheriff's Office, do enjoy the privileges and protections and, indeed, entitlements that our public sector enjoys. I will not go through all the process of that again, but that was the substantial reason for that.

There were some other recommendations, including that there be an amendment to the Courts Administration Act so that there would be a consideration of a person with human resources expertise being placed on the courts council, I think it is called. That is something that we have accepted as a government and are looking to work with the amendments to the legislation as to how we go through that. There are others that the Chief Justice had indicated that he would undertake. I think the government are at one in indicating the acceptance or otherwise of the submissions and the Chief Justice indicating that he would support that position. It is just a matter of undertaking the process.

We have Ms Penny Croser, who has come in as the new State Courts Administrator and who has replaced the previous administrator, who also provided evidence to the committee, as I recall. Certainly, some statement had gone from the Courts Administrator, and certainly the Chief Justice made himself available to give evidence in relation to that inquiry. There is still some work to be done in relation to the recommendations the committee has put. However, to be clear, there seemed to be a misunderstanding on the part of the committee as to the protections that were available to employees in the Sheriff's Office.

In light of that, we have not accepted recommendations 1, 2 and 3, I think, of the committee's report, but otherwise work will be underway to institute the other recommendations. So, yes, it is important, and I think the previous Courts Administrator made a public statement in relation to the support and protection of staff in the workplace. Each of those matters has been canvassed. I maintain the position, as the member has pointed out in relation to this section, that it is important that there be protection of all our staff in the workplace.

I also point out that there has been considerable work undertaken by our acting equal opportunity commissioner in relation to the protection of persons in the legal profession, and that includes the courts. There has also been a body of work undertaken by an inquiry by a similar officer in Victoria in relation to the judiciary. These are all matters that have been taken on board, and there are ongoing committees and discussions, and some of the leadership has already been taken up by the Chief Justice in relation to his courts.

It is a question of ensuring that wherever the workplace, wherever the person is in that workplace—and that includes courts and workplaces at which the legal profession work—the staff and the professional persons involved in those processes are entitled to protection. All those matters are examples of what we as a government are committed to ensuring is undertaken. I thank the Chief Justice in advance for the particular committees and things he has set up.

Can I say that there has been an indication by the government that in relation to sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace we have given notice to a number of agencies of a 'no brief' policy for those chambers and/or legal firms who do not have a committed policy in relation to the protection of staff in the workplace. There are a number of initiatives that are in train, and I invite the Chief Justice to make any further comment as to action he has taken to support his staff.

The Hon. G.G. BROCK: Before that, Mr Chairman, if I may—and I apologise to the Chief Justice—on the fostering of this environment to give them protection, in other words, if it is a Sheriff of the court's authority and they are reporting something, would they have any protection under the whistleblowers act for bringing it to the attention of the courts management?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I cannot give legal advice to the member as to whether a particular complaint or information is transferred, but there are certain provisions under the—I now forget what we have called it, but it is a new act we have passed to replace the old whistleblowers act. It allows for a process that has to be followed for someone to report a concern in relation to workplace conduct, which then provides an umbrella of protection to the party who is making the disclosure. There are very strict obligations in relation to how that works. I indicate that there are laws to protect people in those circumstances that may apply to the matter that is being considered, but I will ask the Chief Justice to make a comment.

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: I have not looked at the act recently but, as long as the communication is made to a person who is a person recognised under the act as someone to whom a complaint can be made, then it will be protected and I am sure that there are such persons within the CAA who can receive complaints about things that have happened in the Sheriff's Office.

Can I just talk about some of the things we have actually done on the ground because the recommendations were really at a legislative level. We have commenced a cultural change program. From March this year, we have appointed a change leader for the Sheriff's Office. We had our own survey of Sheriff's to find out what they were concerned about and what they wanted changed. We established a committee, which comprised a couple of our managers in Sheriff's, rank and file Sheriff's Officers and the PSA. The Sheriff's Officers decided amongst themselves who they wanted as their representatives. They actually selected the independent consultant who conducted the review.

The report was helpful. It confirmed some of the themes that had come out beforehand from the SARC inquiry, for example. But, just from conducting that survey and having rank and file on the committee, there is a real feeling that the Sheriff's Office can be made a better place. I attended a meeting of that committee early on, before the survey came out, and there was a Sheriff's Officer—not a supervisor—from Port Augusta who said, having seen the level of genuine openness and cooperation, they wanted to move forward and make the South Australian Sheriff's Office the best Sheriff's Office not only in the country but in the world. That was his level of what the potential was for improvement.

I mentioned the cost pressure for resources in HR to support this process not just for Sheriff's but across our organisation. Very soon after the SARC report was published, we instituted a policy of no disciplinary action—because that was a large area of complaint, as I am sure you know—without attempting mediation first, unless the behaviour complained of was the sort of behaviour that would warrant summary dismissal or something sort of off the page. For run-of-the-mill disciplinary stuff, no disciplinary action without getting the people aggrieved together with an independent mediator to work things out on the shop floor and move forward.

The Hon. G.G. BROCK: Thank you. To the minister again, but also perhaps to the Chief Justice, this environment of key agency outputs, has that been in place for some time, or has that just been since the SARC inquiry?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: Can you just explain to me the key agencies. I am not aware of what budget paper you are referring to.

The Hon. G.G. BROCK: It is the same one, Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, same questions regarding fostering an environment in which the officers, the staff, etc., can feel comfortable in going forward. Has that been implemented since the SARC report, or has it been in place for some time?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: It had been there before.

The Hon. G.G. BROCK: For how long?

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: We will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. G.G. BROCK: Thank you very much.

Chief Justice KOURAKIS: I think I take your point, though. These things are often stated in documents. The thing is to make them live, and it is fair to say that all our staff have our full attention and we are committed to making it work.

Mr PICTON: Attorney, before we finish this item, I am advised that back on 9 June, in relation to Operation Ironside, you responded to a question on radio about the operation and you were specifically asked whether you had been given advance notice of the raids. You said, and I quote:

I don't think I can make any statement in relation to those matters, these are all operational matters of those agencies and so I wouldn't make any comment in relation to their disclosure to anyone.

My question, Attorney, is: can you explain why you refused to make any comment on this matter but you thought it was fine to make a public statement about an ICAC investigation in 2018?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I have no idea what else the member is talking about. I think the public statement in relation to the raids is now well known in relation to Operation Ironside. This was a police raid that took place across five countries and I think four states in Australia, including ours, so it was hardly a secret once it had actually been achieved. It was probably, in police history, an extraordinary international cooperation that was undertaken. Now, of course, we are dealing with the legacy of that operation being quite successful in police investigation terms.

Obviously our courts and all the other agencies I have referred to will now need to be planned for and paid for to ensure that we bring it to its proper conclusion, including the taking up of claims in relation to property that has been either injunctioned or confiscated at this stage.

Membership:

Hon. A. Koutsantonis substituted for Mr Brown.

The CHAIR: The Attorney has answered that question, member for Kaurana, but I do remind all members that they need to reference a budget line when asking a question.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Objectives, how is that?

The CHAIR: As long as it is referred to in a budget line, which the member for Kaurana I think omitted to do on asking that question.

Mr PICTON: I did, but it was the same budget item as before—page 127.

The CHAIR: The same budget line as before; thank you. Having reached the allotted time, I declare the examination of the proposed payments for the Courts Administration Authority complete. Thank you, Attorney. Thank you, Chief Justice, and your advisers.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I thank the Chief Justice and his staff, and Ms Croser, of course, as our newly appointed administrator.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT, \$173,516,000
ADMINISTERED ITEMS FOR ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT, \$65,845,000

Minister:

Hon. V.A. Chapman, Deputy Premier, Attorney-General, Minister for Planning and Local Government.

Departmental Advisers:

Ms C. Mealor, Chief Executive, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr A. Swanson, Chief Financial Officer, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr A. Kilvert, Executive Director, Policy and Community, Attorney-General's Department.

The CHAIR: We come next to the portfolio of Attorney-General's Department and State Records. The minister appearing is the Attorney-General. I declare the proposed payments open for examination. I ask the Attorney to introduce her advisers and make a short statement if she wishes.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Thank you, Mr Chair. I indicate to the committee that the Chief Executive, Caroline Mealor, of the Attorney-General's Department is joining me; she is to my right. Immediately behind me is Mr Andrew Swanson, the Chief Financial Officer, who is in charge of all the money. Mr Adam Kilvert, to his right, is the Executive Director, Policy and Community. I think that is all that I have officially for this area in terms of advisers.

I might just briefly indicate again that the Attorney-General's Department has undertaken two areas of extraordinary work during the last 12 months. One is to support the provision of services, many of which are well known to members of the committee. I will not repeat them, as they are outlined in the budget papers in relation to the funding of them. However, during the COVID-19 period, since early last year, that has been a very challenging responsibility. I thank the chief executive and her staff for undertaking that work.

I should particularly acknowledge the Crown Solicitor's Office, which has provided an extraordinary amount of work and support during COVID in the preparation of legislation, in the drafting and advice given for directions to our police commissioner, the Coordinator under the Emergency Management Act, and in extending other advice to government.

It has been a challenging time, and it has been a department that has certainly come to the fore in providing all that extra work that has been required, and I am extremely proud of them. The chief executive has also undertaken a separate role of extra responsibility in taking on planning and local government areas of responsibility together with our three generals: the Valuer-General, the Registrar-General and—

Ms MEALOR: The Surveyor-General.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: —the Surveyor-General, Mr Burdett. I nearly forgot him. He is very important. These are areas of extra responsibility that the chief executive and the department have taken on. I must say, personally, I have very much enjoyed that extra portfolio coming into this area of responsibility, but it has been an extra role.

Probably without her knowing it, she also became the coordinator-general for a period of time. That is the fourth general that has disappeared now that the Development Act has been repealed, so she only had that for a short time. Nevertheless, she certainly stepped up and her department has been exceptional during that time. There will be opportunity to consider further those extra portfolios a bit later today but I just wanted that acknowledged at this point.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Attorney. Does the lead speaker for the opposition wish to make an opening statement?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: No.

The CHAIR: If not, I will invite questions.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I refer to Budget 4, Volume 1, page 14, program net cost of services summary regarding the Crown Solicitor's Office.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am sorry, could I confirm which one? Item 3, did you say, Crown Solicitor's Office?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Yes.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: At about point 8 on page 14?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Yes.

The CHAIR: I am sorry to interrupt. It is Budget Paper 4, Volume 1—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Page 14.

The CHAIR: Page 14, thank you.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Are we all on board?

The CHAIR: We are all on the same page.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: The Crown Solicitor's Office has an annual budget of about—well, their budget has dropped dramatically from \$13 million in 2018-19 down to \$4.8 million this financial year. There were media reports that Ms Ranieri, the public sector employment commissioner, was recommended a private investigator from the Crown Solicitor's Office. What process did the Crown Solicitor's Office go through to choose that private investigator, and is it being funded out of the Crown Solicitor's resources?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Can I just say as a general matter that the Crown Solicitor's Office provides services to many different government agencies, and that is part of its job. In many ways, it is the largest legal firm in South Australia. It provides advice to government agencies as part of that and, generally, they pay for it; that is, the services that are provided by the Crown Solicitor's Office. In other words, there is a charge generated and they meet that cost.

In one of the roles of the Crown Solicitor's Office, that work is undertaken at the request of or under instruction from a government agency, and that is also accessible to the office of public employment, Ms Erma Ranieri's agency. She is no exception to that. So I will just make that as a general statement. I will make some inquiries.

The Hon. A. Koutsantonis interjecting:

The CHAIR: The Attorney is providing an answer in relation to the budget and specifically in relation to the budget for the Crown Solicitor's Office.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am advised, Mr Chairman, that we are not aware of the specifics in relation to the appointment or funding or otherwise of a private investigator, which appears to be the basis of some media report that the member is referring to. But I am aware, I am advised, that Ms Ranieri has sought advice from the Crown Solicitor's Office and advice has been provided, so I am not able to provide any other information to the committee at this stage. If there is something else that I can provide, I will make that inquiry and advise the committee accordingly.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: The commissioner for the public sector, Erma Ranieri, said, 'An external investigator has been appointed to investigate the matter. They have extensive experience working with the South Australian government and they were appointed on the recommendation of the Crown Solicitor's Office.'

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I will take that as a comment.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: No, that is a quote from your commissioner for public employment, so my question is—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am sorry, Mr Chairman. I think the member—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Can I have my question?

The CHAIR: No, I think we will wait, Attorney, because the member for West Torrens needs to pose his question.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Yes, thank you. Is that statement accurate?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I do not know the answer to that.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Could you ask your chief executive?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: No, I have just indicated that I cannot assist any further in relation to the appointment or otherwise of a private investigator. I will make that inquiry and, if we are able to furnish some further information in relation to it, then I am happy to do so. I appreciate the office of public employment is in the Premier's area of responsibility, so I suppose as to whether that is accurate or not will be a matter that could perhaps be put to her. In any event, if there is something else that we can provide information on, and we are able to do so, then I will forward that to the committee.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I refer to the same budget line. How many indemnities have been issued to Liberal MPs or former Liberal MPs for any legal proceedings that are currently underway?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I think you have asked this question before, member for West Torrens, but I am happy to make some inquiry as to what I can say in relation to any particular matter. If that is available and able to be done, I will provide it to the committee. I will take it on notice.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: You said in the parliament that your door was always open for people who make complaints. Have you received any complaints from any staff or anyone from the Department for Infrastructure and Transport regarding the conduct of your minister, Corey Wingard?

The CHAIR: Member for West Torrens—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Sure—objectives, the Attorney, page 12.

The CHAIR: Yes. I understand we are most likely still on the Crown Solicitor's Office.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I can change it if you like to page 12, objectives, that the Attorney-General's Department 'develops laws and policy that support safety, diversity, fairness'.

The CHAIR: That would fit with your question much better. Thank you, member for West Torrens.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: So have any people complained to you about the bully-in-chief, Corey Wingard, given your door is always open? No-one?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am not aware of any, but I am trying to struggle with how—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I know you struggle.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: —Minister Wingard is relevant to my department. In any event, it is best if I—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: They are choosing private investigators.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am just letting the committee know, and the member for West Torrens, that I am not aware of any. But, again, if there is some information I can provide for the committee that will be helpful I am happy to do that, but I am not aware of any.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Going back to the first reference—Crown's Solicitor's Office, page 14 of the Agency Statement, Budget Paper 4, Volume 1—how much has the Crown Solicitor's Office expended on investigating Corey Wingard?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I have no idea.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Could you ask? Could you take it on notice?

The CHAIR: Apart from anything else, member for West Torrens, we are dealing with the 2020-21 budget.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Yes.

The CHAIR: I assume we are all aware of the media reports—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Yes.

The CHAIR: —that are driving this line of questioning.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Yes.

The CHAIR: My question is whether it relates to the 2020-21 budget, which finished—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I will tell you why it does, sir.

The CHAIR: —on 30 June.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: The problem that we have here is that there is a budget for the next four years over the forward estimates, and the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment, Ms Ranieri, has had the Premier refer this complaint to her. She has sought advice from the Crown Solicitor's Office and the Crown Solicitor's Office, according to the public sector commissioner, has referred them to a private investigator. So what I am trying to get to is the cost of that private investigation.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: To the best of my knowledge, there is no cost to the Crown Solicitor's Office in relation to that.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: So there is a private investigator?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I have no idea. I was just saying to you there has been no expense debited to the Crown Solicitor's Office in relation to this.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I thought you charged for all advice?

The CHAIR: Member for West Torrens—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: So your earlier statement is incorrect, is it?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Let me—

The CHAIR: Just wait a moment.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Mr Chairman—

The CHAIR: Just wait, Attorney, I will speak.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am sorry.

The CHAIR: I do not, as Chair, need to get too involved unless I have to in the committee's proceedings, but my recollection is that the Attorney stated in answer to previous questions that she was not aware of any approach in relation to a private investigator; is that correct, Attorney?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Correct.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I refer you to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 12. Specifically, my question relates to the administered items for AGD, which states, and I quote, 'On behalf of the Hon. VA Chapman, the agency administers various items,' including ICAC and OPI.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Yes.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Attorney, were you the original complainant to the OPI or ICAC about John Hanlon and Georgina Vasilevski?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Again, the member would well know that I am not in a position to make any statement in relation to that, as I have advised him in the parliament.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Sorry, could you repeat that last part.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: As I have advised you in the parliament.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Attorney, this is the same matter about which you issued a public media statement that revealed the existence of an ICAC investigation without the permission of ICAC; is that right?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I have no idea what you are talking about.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Well, I will tell you. You made a complaint to the ICAC regarding the conduct of Ms Georgina Vasilevski and Mr John Hanlon. That was then taken up by the ICAC and investigated, so you knew—you were informed by the ICAC—that there was an ongoing investigation. As Attorney-General, you subsequently met with the ICAC commissioner and he said:

My recollection of the subsequent conversation is that any statement made by the Attorney would not include reference to the ICAC and that the Attorney would say publicly that neither she nor the government could comment.

Of course, history tells us that the Attorney did. She ignored that advice and flouted the ICAC legislation and went out and made a public comment about that. My question is, Attorney: when you were interviewed by South Australian anti-corruption police, did you inform them that you were the original complainant?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: The member for West Torrens can make all these assertions, but I will not answer the assertion—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: No, the right to remain silent.

The CHAIR: Member for West Torrens! The member for West Torrens has asked his question—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: He has asked his question and I just indicate that there is nothing helpful I can contribute to the committee in relation to this matter. There have been questions asked in the general parliament and I have given answers in relation to those matters, so I do not think there is anything else I can more helpfully add.

The CHAIR: I just remind all committee members that when asking a question of a minister, the minister is able to answer that in—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Answer any way she—

The CHAIR: Just wait, Tom—whatever way they see fit.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: That is right, so all accused people have the right to silence.

The CHAIR: No, that is not what I said.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: That is an outrageous statement.

The CHAIR: What I said, member for West Torrens—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: It is true.

The CHAIR: —is that ministers are able to answer questions in this committee or in the parliament in whatever way they see fit.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Attorney, after a court threw out the Hanlon-Vasilevski case for lack of evidence after the DPP's stunning statement to the court, was it appropriate for you to then stand up in front of the media and flag a possible appeal or reopening of the case?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I think I have covered this matter in the general parliament. I have advised the parliament and I will confirm again that, as I understand it, the DPP office is still yet to consider what action is taken, if any, in relation to the outcome of the Magistrates Court and as to whether there is any other action they may take. That is a matter for the DPP. To the best of my knowledge, he or his office have not made a statement on that matter yet, nor have I received any briefing on it.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: For the benefit of the committee, the accused, Mr Hanlon, said to InDaily:

I was surprised to hear those comments made publicly by the Attorney-General.

I understand the need for a review—but more in the sense of how we ever managed to get to this situation in the first place, as opposed to the Attorney-General's suggestion that there could be some kind of appeal of the decision that was made on Friday.

Further, he said the Attorney's remarks 'put me under more stress and pressure'. Do you have anything that you want to respond to Mr Hanlon?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: No.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: No?

The CHAIR: Bear in mind, committee members, that the member for West Torrens is providing us with what was reported in the media.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Yes.

The CHAIR: Member for West Torrens, remind me what budget line we are on.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: The administration of justice, sir, and the objectives—how is that?

The CHAIR: It is fairly broad, is it not?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Yes, it is; it is a cracker. Can I also ask, Attorney, given you made an ex gratia payment to an accused murderer of over \$2 million, who is still the only SAPOL suspect for the drowning murder of his fiancée, after having forged multiple documents on her life and there was severe bruising on her body—

The CHAIR: Once again, member for West Torrens, this has been—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I know this is uncomfortable, sir.

The CHAIR: No—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I know it is uncomfortable.

The CHAIR: Member for West Torrens, this has been—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: It is not uncomfortable for me.

The CHAIR: That is alright, Attorney.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: You are fine with it?

The CHAIR: Member for West Torrens—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: It is your time.

The CHAIR: —and Attorney—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: It is your estimates.

The CHAIR: —order! This, again, is a subject that has been well canvassed in the media. The Attorney has answered questions in the parliament—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Not really.

The CHAIR: —on this matter in the past, from your good self, member for West Torrens, no doubt. Attorney, do you wish to respond to that?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I have not finished asking my question, sir.

The CHAIR: My apologies.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Do you have a question, member for West Torrens?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I do. Given she is prepared to pay an accused murderer, who is still the only suspect in a murder case—

The CHAIR: There is a point of order.

Mr CREGAN: There is extensive argument, under 97—

The CHAIR: Yes, I uphold that point of order.

Mr CREGAN: —prior to a question which may come but it certainly has not come.

The CHAIR: We are all familiar with the situation surrounding this. Member for West Torrens, it has been well canvassed in the media and the parliament, and the question is?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Are you considering any compensation to Ms Vasilevski or Mr Hanlon for what has happened to them?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I have already answered this question when you asked me in the parliament, so I have nothing further to add.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Can you just remind the committee what that was?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I do not think that is necessary. There is nothing else I can helpfully add in relation to this matter. As I have indicated, it is a matter that is still with the DPP and, when any decision is made, it will be a matter that is either back before the courts or not. It will be a matter, if and when I receive any application from anyone, that I will consider, but at this point there is nothing else I can helpfully add.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Just for the benefit of the committee, the fine for breaching the ICAC Act is \$30,000, which the Attorney escaped. These two former—

The CHAIR: Member for West Torrens, I am actually going to ask you to withdraw that.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Sorry?

The CHAIR: Could you withdraw that?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Withdraw what, sir?

The CHAIR: You are furnishing a lot of argument here and I do not think it is appropriate, member for West Torrens, that you throw in debate that might assist your line of questioning, particularly in that vein.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: It is uncomfortable for the Attorney, I know, but sometimes these things need to be ventilated publicly because of—

The CHAIR: Member for West Torrens, you have suggested that in some way the Attorney-General has 'escaped' making a payment.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: No, sorry, sir, she was not charged with an offence. I withdraw the 'escape'.

The CHAIR: Thank you. That is what I asked you to do.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: She was lucky enough not to be charged with an offence.

The CHAIR: There is a point of order.

Mr CREGAN: Clearly 97—clearly.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Have you ruled so?

Mr CREGAN: No, I have invited the Chair to rule.

The CHAIR: Member for West Torrens, I am asking you to be very careful here. You have withdrawn your initial suggestion.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Yes, of 'escaped', and saying that she was not charged.

The CHAIR: That is a matter of fact.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Yes. I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 11. Specifically, my questions relate to the objective of the AGD, which says, 'The Attorney-General's Department develops laws and policy—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Sorry, I am on page 11 and I have the contents. Is there some other page?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Budget Paper 4, the Agency Statement Volume 1, page 11.

The CHAIR: Which is a list of contents.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Have I misquoted? I apologise, sir; it is on the objectives.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: That is on page 12.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Page 12; my apologies. Attorney, let's begin with regard to fairness and justice.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Sorry, this is on line 1?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I am referring to the objectives of the—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: 'Fairness and justice in the community'. Yes, I see those words.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Excellent. I am glad. Attorney, can you advise the committee when you exactly first made contact with the Digance family?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: With who?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Annabel and Greg Digance.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I cannot see how that has anything to do with these matters, Mr Chairman. It is bizarre to me. I am more than happy to answer. There have been some questions that have been asked by the member in the parliament on these matters, but it is nothing to do with what is before us.

The CHAIR: It is tenuous to say the least. It is a tenuous link, member for West Torrens, but it is a very specific question about—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Page 12, the ministerial office and her ministerial responsibilities. When did the Attorney-General first have contact with Annabel and Greg Digance regarding their accusations?

Mr CREGAN: Point of order: it has not been established in the subsequent question that there is any proper connection to the budget line items presently being examined, and I ask you to rule the question out of order.

The CHAIR: Before I make that ruling, can we have the budget line again? The member for Kaurna has identified a better budget line for the question.

Mr PICTON: Well, an equally good one, sir, I believe. It is Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 13, ministerial office resources, the office of the Hon. V.A. Chapman, \$3.251 million.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Yes, and what was the question?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Did you as Attorney-General meet with Annabel and Greg Digance?

Mr CREGAN: Point of order, Mr Chairman: again, I cannot see any connection to the original—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I would be saying that too, if I were you, but the question is—

Mr CREGAN: —budget line item.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: —did you meet with Annabel Digance?

Mr CREGAN: And I invite you to make a similar ruling.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Mr Chairman, it is a matter of public record.

The CHAIR: Order! I will just rule on the point of order. The member for West Torrens is using a very general budget line to ask very specific questions about particular individuals.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Yes.

The CHAIR: It is tenuous that the Attorney—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: It is a common practice in estimates.

The CHAIR: Just wait, member for West Torrens! The Attorney, I think, was indicating to the committee that she was prepared to say something to that question.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I have made statements to the parliament on a number of occasions that in relation to any alleged bullying or harassment by members of parliament, of which they are victims, that they are welcome to come and speak to me as Attorney-General. Indeed, in the last 19 years I have been here at parliament there have been colleagues in the parliament of different political persuasions who have done so.

I have been quite open about that, and I make it very clear that I consider—and I think our government considers—the importance of every workplace being free of bullying and harassment. I have worked in this workplace for the last 19 years and I maintain that position, but I do not think there is anything else further that I can helpfully add to the committee in relation to my role as Attorney-General or as a member of parliament in relation to conduct that is illegal, unacceptable or unlawful in this workplace.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Did you contact them or did they contact you?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: There is nothing else I can further helpfully add.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Did you seek any advice from your department regarding your dealings with the Digances?

Mr CREGAN: Mr Chairman, point of order.

The CHAIR: Before I take the point of order, what was the question, member for West Torrens?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Did the Attorney-General seek any advice from her department regarding contacting or being contacted by Ms Digance or Mr Digance?

The CHAIR: There is a point of order.

Mr CREGAN: Yes, sir. The Attorney has made plain that there is nothing she can add in relation to this subject matter. The member presses on, in my submission, in contravention of standing order 128: repetition. I ask you to—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Repetition!

Mr CREGAN: You are pressing the same substance—

The CHAIR: Member for Kavel, with all due respect, if we picked up on every item of repetition in this place we would be discussing it for a long time.

Mr CREGAN: Yes, Mr Chair, you may be right.

The CHAIR: Yes, but you are quite right, member for Kavel: the Attorney has already answered this question, and she may refer to her previous answer or she may have something to add.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I do not think there is anything else I can helpfully add to provide to the committee—

The CHAIR: Nothing further to add.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: —in relation to this, but I am happy to take any other questions on my ministerial office resources.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: After the Digances were charged, did you seek advice or receive any advice from the Director of Public Prosecutions about whether the Digance couple should or could appear before a parliamentary committee that you wished to establish?

Mr CREGAN: Mr Chairman, I maintain my objection.

The CHAIR: No, sorry, member for Kavel, I think this is pursuing the same line of questioning, but I do not see it as repetition—at this stage, member for West Torrens—but the Attorney can answer as she wishes.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: She won't.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: As I understand the question, it was: did I seek advice from someone in my agency—DPP or Crown Solicitor—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: DPP.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: —in relation to persons who may be required to give evidence to a committee that I proposed to establish? No.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: You did not think it appropriate to speak to the DPP about calling people to a parliamentary inquiry who were facing criminal charges?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Certainly not.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: But you saw fit to contact the DPP regarding Mr Hanlon and Ms Vasilevski.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: You make that assertion but that is—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: You said so in the parliament.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: That is completely rejected. I said in the parliament that I had sought a briefing from the DPP as to the process of the matter—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: That is the same thing.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: —which is something that I am commonly provided with.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: You do it lots of times, do you?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I have said that to the parliament already, that I get regular briefings. I have regular monthly meetings with the DPP and I get regular briefings in relation to matters, particularly if they are likely to be in the public arena.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: When was the last time you had contact with the Digance family?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I think the last occasion was when I indicated to the parliament that I had had phone call from Ms Digance. It would be months ago now.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: No subsequent emails or correspondence?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Not that I am aware of.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Did you take on notice my earlier question about legal indemnities?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Sorry, today or some other day?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Today.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: There was a question about the Crown Solicitor's Office, yes, and I have indicated that if I am able to provide any information I will. I am not sure what information there is or what I am allowed to say, but if there is I think I have indicated to the committee I will make it known.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Okay, excellent. Have you received any advice from the DPP regarding the Digance matter or sought any advice from the DPP regarding the Digance prosecution?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Certainly not that I am aware of, no.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: So you have not sought a briefing like you have in the other matters?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: There has already been public commentary made about it, so no.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: So you have not sought a briefing?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Not that I am aware of. That is a matter that is entirely a matter for the DPP.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Have you spoken to Ms Sandi McDonald regarding the prosecution of Mr Hanlon and Ms Vasilevski?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Not that I am aware of.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: No?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: No, not that I am aware of.

The CHAIR: Member for West Torrens, for my information, who is the person you are referring to?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Ms McDonald is the Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions. I think that is her official title.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Just for the benefit of the committee, the actual DPP has recused himself of involvement in the prosecution of Helena Vasilevski, which you would think probably the Attorney-General might have as well, given that she was the original complainant, but she has not.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: This is outrageous, these statements, Mr Chairman.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: The DPP who is handling the matter is the assistant DPP, who is Ms Sandi McDonald. That is why I am asking those questions, sir—so, for your benefit. On how many occasions have you sought advice from the DPP over the last financial year on its prosecutions, on any of its prosecutions?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: As I have indicated, the DPP, as the head of the unit, does make provision of a monthly report to me. We meet and he advises of matters that are progressing and whether they have been successful on appeals or not. His general advice to me as the Attorney-General, I understand, is just the usual order of business as to matters. Obviously the DPP is able to come to me to seek extra resources if necessary, and this is just in the ordinary course of business.

Sometimes there are cases of notoriety. I think the member may not have been present in the committee, but we have just had the Chief Justice in here to consider matters, including expenses arising out of Operation Ironside. These are matters which, of course, I will discuss with a number of agencies, including the DPP's office.

As the member is aware, the DPP is an independent statutory office for the purposes of who gets prosecuted and the prosecution of those matters, just as the police commissioner has independent statutory independence as to who is investigated. That is a matter which I respect. But he does, of course, as the head of the unit, come to me to canvass all sorts of things, including, sadly, the current ill health of our witness support dog, Zero, who is very ill. He will come to me to report on myriads of things that his department is doing, including the progress of a number of cases, especially if it involves extra support being required for him to undertake his responsibility and for his team.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Given you have raised the progress of prosecutions, have you ever had any discussions—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Sorry?

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Given you raised the progress or timing of prosecutions, have you—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: He gives me a written report of these.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Sure. Have you ever received or asked for a written report on the timing of the prosecution of Fraser Ellis?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: No.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: When did you first learn that the trial would begin in November?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I cannot recall specifically, but there is a regular update of the court listings of cases, and that is something that is online.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: So you had no prior knowledge about the timing of the Ellis prosecution, because it all seems to have happened very, very quickly?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: This is not a matter that I have control over nor does my chief executive. The running of the cases that are brought before the court by the DPP office is a matter for the DPP and his team to manage and progress and they do that in concert with, presumably, the defence attorney and the courts that are hearing the cases. They are all matters that are sometimes called operational, but these are entirely in relation to the management of those cases. Should the DPP consider there are matters about which I need to be informed, presumably he does that. He regularly reports to me. Should he require some extra support, or indeed give me advice as to legislative reform that he recommends, these are all things that frequently come in his reports to me.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Thank you. I will pass on to my colleague. I will yield to my colleague, the member for Kaurua.

Mr PICTON: Further to that same question—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Sorry, can I just identify the—

The CHAIR: Budget line, member for Kaurua, please?

Mr PICTON: Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 19, the DPP. Are the reports you receive from the DPP general in terms of time lines for prosecutions or do they list every individual matter and its expected time line?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am sure they do not list every matter but matters of significance that are determined by the DPP that he thinks I ought to be informed on. Some of that includes advice as to whether something is on appeal or whether it is expected to be heard in the High Court at a certain time or whether it is listed for trial or those sorts of things.

Mr PICTON: Has the Ellis matter been listed on those reports specifically?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Not what I can call specifically, but it may well have been.

Mr PICTON: Could you take that on notice?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Again, these are matters that I am not sure whether I am allowed to talk about, but I just make the point that I get regular reports on any matters of significance according to the DPP that I should be advised of, particularly if there is any proposed loss by the DPP or whether there is any extra money or resources required for it or whether there need to be applications for judges to be brought interstate—all these types of machinery matters to support the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions' role in the prosecution of matters in our state courts.

Mr PICTON: So you will not even take on notice whether that item was listed specifically in one of those reports?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am not sure that I am able to discuss what is in these reports. These are matters that the DPP reports to me. I am just indicating to you that I meet with him at least monthly. He provides me a written report. I do not think I am able to provide information in relation to those reports, but I will make the inquiry.

I indicate to you that I am given a summary of matters of significance and reports on outstanding cases, particularly cases where there may have been a determination by the Court of

Criminal Appeal, now the Appeal Court of South Australia, that would influence whether we should give consideration to any law reform or amendment to our legislation or to ensure that we protect the appropriate prosecution of matters, and defence obviously, of matters in our criminal justice system.

So there are a number of purposes for it, but if the member has a look at the Director of Public Prosecutions' law, that is, the legislation, he will see that there is a statutory protection in relation to the decisions being made by the DPP as to who is prosecuted and indeed whether there is any subsequent withdrawal of those prosecutions. They are matters for the DPP.

Mr PICTON: Have you ever shared any of that information received from a report from the DPP with any of your cabinet colleagues or the cabinet?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I cannot discuss any matters in cabinet.

Mr PICTON: Have you ever shared the information with one of your colleagues?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: As I say, I cannot make any discussion in relation to cabinet matters.

Mr PICTON: Or outside of cabinet?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: What do you mean—to the general world?

Mr PICTON: No, to one of your colleagues.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: You?

Mr PICTON: No, one of your cabinet colleagues.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Again, I cannot discuss matters of cabinet. The member has been in cabinet. He understands the reason for that.

Mr PICTON: If you are not in cabinet, then it is not protected by cabinet.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: That may be your summary of the law in relation to cabinet but, in relation to cabinet confidentiality, I am not at liberty to advise the committee about what the conversations are I have had in cabinet.

Mr PICTON: Would it be appropriate for you to raise issues that the DPP has confidentially raised with you?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I think I have said this many times. I cannot make it any clearer. I cannot and will not be disclosing to this committee conversations I have had in cabinet for the reasons which are well known to the member.

Mr PICTON: On the same budget line, on 6 June the Chief Justice spoke on radio about the—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Same budget line? I have a page number, and that is all so far—page 19.

Mr PICTON: Yes, the DPP. On 6 June, the Chief Justice spoke on radio about the proper resourcing of the Operation Ironside court cases, and I quote, 'to the credit of the DPP he has already commenced that process, he's been busy recruiting to increase the resources of the Director's Office'. The budget papers only show an expected increase of 1.3 FTE for the coming year for the DPP. My question is: how will that very small increase in staffing address the needs of Operation Ironside?

The CHAIR: That is a great question relating specifically to the budget. Well done, member for Kurna.

Mr PICTON: I am not sure what you are getting at, Chair.

The CHAIR: I am saying it was a good question.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: It is an excellent question.

Mr PICTON: Well, let's see if we get a good answer.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I think it is very clear that, when the Chief Justice was here a few moments ago, he and I set out, and made I think very clear, that there are a number of agencies which have been invited to and are yet to present their submissions as to what extra resource they may require.

Mr PICTON: But he is busy recruiting already, apparently.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I will not go into those again at this point. I will just make the point that the DPP was one of them. His office has been invited to also identify and participate in the task force that was referred to by the Chief Justice as to what might be required. I think I also mentioned that there are already conversations at the national level in relation to expertise that may be required in relation to the forensic side of any evidence in this particular case. That is yet to occur.

What I think I also made clear, but if I have not I will repeat it, is that my understanding is that the process from there is that I would then present a submission to the Treasurer. I expect it may go to the Mid-Year Budget Review or to the next year's annual submission, depending on when these agencies present them to me, to present the case to Treasury as to why we would need, in the special circumstances of this case, extra resources for one or more of our agencies, and the DPP office would be one of them. At the moment, I am expecting at this point that the DPP's presented budget has not identified provision for Operation Ironside, but it is open and yet to be considered.

Mr PICTON: Is the DPP currently recruiting for additional positions?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Not that I am aware of, but I have certainly spoken to him as one of the agencies that I have indicated. He has been invited to think about what resources are going to be needed to successfully prosecute multi-defendants in relation to this matter.

Fortunately, my chief executive is a former prosecutor in the DPP office. She is very familiar with the obligations needed in this area, but ultimately it will be a matter for these units or agencies to present their contribution. We will put together a submission to go to Treasury, and that matter will be considered. I would not suggest that the less than one full-time equivalent proposed staff member at point 4 on page 19 is in any way reflective of that. It is a different matter.

Mr PICTON: The Chief Justice said very clearly that the DPP has already been busy recruiting to increase the resources of the director's office. Is that incorrect, what the Chief Justice was saying, or you have not been advised, or there is some recruitment underway?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Can I just indicate this: the DPP has indicated to me, in general terms, that he would expect that with such a significant case more resources will be required. Even if the defendants plead guilty to charges that have been made, as some of them have, and those pleas are accepted, there is often a necessity for those matters to be presented for sentencing at a higher court—they have been on the charges—at which experienced prosecuting counsel will be required to attend. I do not doubt for one moment that he is looking at that aspect. He has certainly indicated to me, in general terms, that he sees that it may be necessary to look outside the state, even, but again these are matters which are being discussed at a national level.

As you would expect, the criminal bar in South Australia will probably be approached for representation on behalf of a number of defendants. When such a big case is being advanced, there are a number of questions that need to be looked at, and one of them is the DPP resources, to successfully prosecute and/or put submissions in relation to sentencing in a number of these cases. I expect there will be extra resource.

Mr PICTON: Have they started already or not?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am not aware that he has advertised. Certainly, he is looking out amongst South Australia's cohort in the legal profession as to what might be available, and that is as I would expect.

Mr PICTON: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 12, in relation to the department. It says specifically:

The Attorney-General's Department...develops laws and policy that supports safety, diversity, fairness and justice in the community.

Why is it that, according to the I Work for SA survey, conducted from April to June, only one-quarter of AGD employees, and I quote, 'think it is safe to speak up and challenge the way things are done in this agency'?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I will start by indicating that our government is very proud to have, for the first time, in 2018 funded a survey of the public sector and then repeated it this year to ask the public sector about their views on a number of things. I think that is extremely important and I am very proud that it has been undertaken. It is our government's view that for too long they had not been asked and there was no funding available for this to occur, so I am very pleased that it has occurred. For the first time, in 2018 they were asked and again a survey was undertaken this year as a follow-up to that invitation. The performance of the Attorney-General's Department I think has been very commendable—

Mr PICTON: Commendable? Seventy-five per cent do not feel safe.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Just one moment, if I may—

The CHAIR: Order, member for Kaurana! You have asked the question.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am very pleased that there has been a significant increase in the recent survey of respondents, and across the public sector the published position is that the Attorney-General's Department has been commendable in this regard. There are a number areas which need significant improvement in relation to the support of our public sector so that they might do the best they can to serve the public of South Australia.

For the detail of this, I will invite the chief executive to provide further information on the survey. I have quite a bit of the material here, but she is principally responsible as the chief executive of this now expanded public sector agency, which now includes, as I have indicated, the planning and local government areas of responsibility, which have come on since the 2018 survey. It therefore means we are not exactly comparing apples with apples, but that is a matter I will ask her to expand upon.

Ms MEALOR: As you are no doubt aware, the survey that was carried out has been divided up into seven different areas, and across those the Attorney-General's Department's results are better than they were in all those areas from the 2018 survey, with the scores increasing by something between 4 and 9 per cent across each of those areas, and all the AGD scores in the seven areas were also above the public sector average in all areas, ranging from 4 per cent to 13 per cent improvement on the general public sector average. Certainly there are areas for the department to work on, but overall we are very pleased with the results and the fact that it shows a substantial increase and improvement right across those areas.

Mr PICTON: Attorney, how do you think it is satisfactory that only a quarter of people feel safe to speak up and challenge the way things are done in your agency?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Chief executive?

Mr PICTON: That is what you said. You said that you thought it was satisfactory.

The CHAIR: Member for Kaurana, apologies. It might be my age creeping up on me, but I did not hear the question or the answer actually, so could you repeat it for me?

Mr PICTON: Yes, I am very happy to. Attorney, you said in your previous answer that you believed that these were appropriate or satisfactory results for the department. On what planet is it appropriate or satisfactory that only a quarter of the staff in the agency feel that it is safe to speak up and challenge the way things are done in the agency?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Chief executive?

Ms MEALOR: I am not suggesting that there is not room for improvement; in fact, that is the whole point of undertaking surveys like this—to be able to ascertain those areas that need to be worked on. We do not just undertake the survey and then walk away from it. The next steps for us—and we have already started on this—to look at those areas that require improvement and to work out the best way to improve in those areas and what we need to do across the department. We will

be undertaking further focus groups with staff and we will be devising an action plan to improve on those areas where the scores can be higher.

Mr PICTON: Attorney, do you take personal responsibility for the fact that only 25 per cent of staff in the agency feels safe to speak up and challenge the way things are done?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: As a member of the government, we do take responsibility for ensuring that the workplace, in which over 100,000 public servants work in this state, is not only safe but optimal in relation to their having the capacity to undertake their work and serve the people of South Australia. We are very proud of them, we are committed to ensure that they have a safe workplace and we are very committed to ensuring that, as much as possible, they are recognised in the work that they do, that they are given promotion, advancement and career opportunities in the workplace and that that continues to improve.

That is the whole reason for our being quite transparent in our invitation to the public sector to identify any issues, concerns, aspects—good or bad—that they wish to, and they have done so. I am very pleased: I think my description of the results in this regard is 'commendable'. It has increased for the second time; there is a change of profile of all the public servants that the chief executive is now directly responsible for, and again I will invite her to make any other comments she would like to in relation to how we might continue to work on this project. The government, including me, is very proud of our commitment to the public sector and ensuring the safety and advancement in the workplace that they have.

Ms MEALOR: I am not sure there is anything else I can add to what the Attorney said.

Mr PICTON: Attorney, what action have you taken personally since the release of these shocking statistics from the I Work for SA survey?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I do not accept the question that there is a shocking report. As a government, we are very proud to have committed to inviting our public sector to have a say. We have done it again the third year into government to try to make sure that there is a continuing dialogue in relation to how they feel about their position and their opportunities in the public sector.

We as a government are by far the largest employer in South Australia and therefore we have what we consider a very great responsibility to make sure, firstly, that they have a safe workplace and an opportunity for advancement in a career in the service of the public. In addition to that, we are responsible for the measured expenditure of public money and we want to ensure that the public get the best from those who serve them. That includes the government and its employees. In this regard, the Premier has been very clear about ensuring that we continue this survey and that it is noted and acted on.

At this point, a request has gone to the heads of departments to consider the survey results, meet with their respective heads of units, consider the employment of other measures to improve where possible and, indeed, to share that with other agencies if they are in an agency where there is better performance. Again, I will invite the CE to make a contribution if she feels that there have been things learned from these surveys in the application of that and the progress being made in consulting with the units to advance the improvement being sought.

Ms MEALOR: I would only add that as recently as last week I did meet with the senior heads of units to talk about the survey results and to talk about the need to establish an action plan to improve in those areas where we can improve. That work is well underway.

Mr PICTON: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, pages 38 and 39, the Office of the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity. Attorney, how many candidates were considered for the role of equal opportunity commissioner ahead of the government appointing your Chief of Staff to the position?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: As the member knows, Dr Niki Vincent, who was the former equal opportunity commissioner, elected to leave South Australia to take up a position of some advancement in Victoria, and we wished her well in that regard. It was, I think, some eight months earlier than the expected time of the conclusion of her contract. Nevertheless, an acting equal

opportunity commissioner was put in place and then, for a short time, another party while consideration was given to a replacement.

Ms Jodeen Carney was someone I considered worthy of consideration by the cabinet for appointment. Not only had she worked in the Northern Territory as a lawyer, a bureaucrat, a member of parliament and a consultant during her decades in the Northern Territory but she had worked for both Northern Territory and commonwealth governments of different political persuasions.

I felt that she certainly had the experience and, in particular, she had looked at difficulties that other jurisdictions had faced in relation to equality and diversity and had some considerable understanding of these issues. Although she had worked some time as Chief of Staff to me, she was certainly well and truly qualified for that position. She came with high commendation, as I said, from—

Mr PICTON: From you.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: —other parties of different political persuasions, including the Labor government in the Northern Territory. Her diversity of experience I felt was worthy of presentation and, indeed, ultimately the Governor signed her appointment.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: On that question, who was the referee from the Labor government in the Northern Territory?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I certainly will not be talking about the details of who was involved in that regard, from my recollection, but she had written a report of her work for the Labor government in the Northern Territory. It was titled something like 'Suffer, the little children'. It was a very long and tragic report in relation to child protection, which was really a lightning bolt in the child protection exposé, I suppose, of how children were being exploited and abused.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Your statement was—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: In the Northern Territory, she was one of the first under the Labor government to actually progress that. My recollection was that it was before the current Labor leader, Mr Gunner, but I cannot now recall specifically to whom she had provided the report. My recollection was that it was one of the female members of the cabinet of the Labor government.

In any event, I can have a look at those, but I was certainly satisfied that she had done an extraordinary amount of work since her work in the parliament and also legally. I thought she had excellent credentials for recommendation. Indeed, what I have been very pleased to note is that she has taken up a considerable amount of work. In fact, my chief executive was advising me that it was a report into youth justice that she prepared that came in advance of the royal commission.

Going back to what I was going to say, since her appointment this year—just to be clear, she had not undertaken that work; it was the acting equal opportunity commissioners who undertook the reviews of the parliament and the legal profession—she has progressed with the development of disability guidelines for employers, which I have been very pleased to see.

As members of the committee would be aware, and certainly other members of the parliament would be aware, in the repeated annual reports of the equal opportunity commissioner to this parliament, which I have read for the last 19 years, in more recent years there has been an alarming increase in the number of complaints in the area of disability, regarding either access to employment or, frequently, schools.

These are of great concern, and I am very pleased that she has taken up the initiative in this regard. So, yes, she has hit the ground running. She is not only well credentialled but, pleasingly I think, addressing one of those very difficult areas that we need to address as a community.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Attorney. Having gone past the allotted time, I declare the examination of the Attorney-General's Department, including State Records, complete. Further consideration of the proposed payments for the Attorney-General's portfolio will resume at 3.15pm.

Sitting suspended from 15:03 to 15:15.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA, \$29,437,000
ADMINISTERED ITEMS FOR ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA, \$502,000

Membership:

Mr Pederick substituted for Mr Whetstone.

Minister:

Hon. V.A. Chapman, Deputy Premier, Attorney-General, Minister for Planning and Local Government.

Departmental Advisers:

Mr M. Sherry, Electoral Commissioner, Electoral Commission of South Australia.

Mr D. Gully, Deputy Electoral Commissioner, Electoral Commission of South Australia.

Mr I. Clayfield, Chief Financial Officer, Electoral Commission of South Australia.

The CHAIR: Welcome back, everybody, to Estimates Committee A. The portfolio for examination now is the Electoral Commission of South Australia and the minister appearing is the Attorney-General. The estimate of payments is the Electoral Commission of South Australia and Administered Items for the Electoral Commission of South Australia. I declare the proposed payments open for examination. I invite the Attorney to introduce her advisers and make a short statement, should she wish.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: May I indicate to my right the Electoral Commissioner, Mr Mick Sherry, who is present today, who I am sure is well known to members. Behind me is the deputy commissioner, Mr David Gully, who I am sure is also well known to members. Perhaps less in the public eye is the chief financial officer, Mr Ian Clayfield, who is directly behind me. He is in charge of the money, so we are very pleased to have him here today to assist.

May I indicate a couple of matters that I think are important for this committee to be aware of. In the next 18 months, we are going to have a federal election, a state election and a local government election. The Australian Electoral Commission is largely responsible for the supervision of the first, and the latter two, together with other responsibilities that they continue to provide for elections around the state, are going to be an extra load on our Electoral Commission. That ought to be acknowledged, particularly as we are still living with the legacy of COVID-19 and how we assemble and undertake our general life activities, including such things as elections.

I bring to the attention of members that we have some constitutional obligations. In the event the federal government calls its election in March 2022, the state election is able to be deferred, under the provisions of the Constitution Act 1934, up to three weeks to 9 April. As members know, we have a fixed election obligation under our law. A large amount of work would then be undertaken by the Electoral Commission, that being rebooking polling places, rebooking advertising, and staffing requirements being reconsidered, given the two large elections within a month of each other.

I understand the commission has commenced planning contingencies should the federal government call an election during this time. In other words, this has already been planned for. It has not happened in the time that I have been in the parliament. I think the 2006 election was the first fixed term election under the new regime, but we have had a number since.

Although from time to time there has been speculation about whether a federal election would fall on the same day, a few elections ago we had Tasmania and South Australia on the same election day and it would have been a very difficult situation if the federal government of the day had determined that they would hold an election on that day. So we have a contingency there. I would

like to thank the Electoral Commissioner and his commission for undertaking this large body of work. For the next 18 months, we are going to need to be fairly flexible.

There are two other areas of reform that I want to briefly refer to, which ultimately the parliament will consider, and one is the question of how we deal with pre-poll voting. The reason I mention it is that during COVID already we have seen Western Australia, Queensland and New Zealand undertake elections in these difficult times, and we have seen an ever-increasing number of people elect, because of the circumstances or otherwise, to seek out pre-poll voting. I think in one of those elections nearly 50 per cent of the eligible voting population voted before election day. So this is a real and pressing issue for us to consider.

The other is a matter which the Electoral Commissioner in his report to me, after the last election, proposed regarding the use of telephone-assisted voting. Members would be aware that telephone voting has been available for vision-impaired voters in Victoria since 2010, New South Wales since 2011, Queensland since 2015 and Western Australia since 2017. Victoria also offers telephone voting to electors with other forms of disability.

Consideration is now being given to this being available for those who are visually impaired or with another disability or for those who are overseas. The reason I mention this to the committee is that during the 2018 state election 712 postal packs were issued to South Australian residents overseas, and out of those only 48 postal votes arrived back in time to be counted. Additionally, only 616 votes were taken at overseas locations. In respect of the resources, the government has provided the Electoral Commission with \$150,000 in the 2021-22 financial year to implement this new initiative, with 20 additional staff to undertake this work through the two-week period before polling day.

I just wanted to mention those two areas of reform, which obviously we will work through as a parliament. We do need to be nimble in these COVID circumstances. I thank the commissioner and his team in advance for the work that they are doing and their continued advice as to how we might best ensure that we continue to have free, fair and democratic elections and also that we understand the significance of the impact that COVID-19 has had on the movement of and the capacity of a number of our citizens in relation to voting. With that, I indicate to the committee I am happy to answer any questions.

Membership:

Mr Brown substituted for Hon. A. Koutsantonis.

Mr PICTON: Thank you to the commissioner, the deputy commissioner and staff for being here today. I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 2, pages 14 and 15 in relation to electoral services. From my reading of it, the budget for the commission for these items is increasing by \$21.4-odd million this financial year. Does that represent the cost of the election?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: The budget has been prepared on the basis that it is expected that there will be the state election, which of course is to be the third Saturday in March 2022. So it is a fixed date—

Mr PICTON: Yes, I am aware of that.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: —and has been considered for the purposes of the budget preparation, yes.

Mr PICTON: What is the total cost of the election expected to be?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I might invite the commissioner to make a contribution in this regard.

Mr SHERRY: Thank you. The budget we have is \$23.1 million. That is, of course, as you have noted, an increase from the budget we had for the 2018 state election, but there have been a number of business improvements and legislative requirements that we identified throughout our evaluation of the 2018 state election that have caused this increase in funding. I talk about a number

of things. In particular we have a new learning management system for all our polling officials. We also have a new onboarding system to engage the polling officials and put them in various places to do with the election. That is a significant cost in itself.

Mr PICTON: Just for the record, what was the cost of the 2018 election?

Mr SHERRY: It was \$16.7 million.

Mr PICTON: How many staff are expected to be hired for this election, and how does that compare with the previous one?

Mr SHERRY: We are aiming to have approximately 6,000 staff engaged for this election. That is approximately the same as we engaged for the 2018 state election, but I will put a caveat on it. We are currently doing our COVID management plan, and part of that talks about an option of having what we call a hygiene officer at each particular polling place across the state to make sure that electors feel safe coming into our polling places. If you can imagine, there are approximately 700 polling places across the state. Some of those—namely, about 47—will be open for about 10 days of the early voting period, so when you extrapolate that out, it is a large cost in itself.

Mr PICTON: Has that cost been estimated?

Mr SHERRY: We are still working through that at the moment. In relation to our COVID-19 management plan, although we have never conducted a state election in a COVID environment, we are fortunate that a number of state electoral bodies have. I am talking about Queensland, WA and the Northern Territory. We are engaging very, very closely with them. We actually have their COVID management plans already and we are developing our own in consultation with SA Health. I might take this opportunity to thank them for their great help in putting together our particular plan in itself.

We are still working through what the final cost will be. It goes down into minute detail; for example, one of the recommendations is we have a pencil for every eligible elector, so that is over 1.2 million pencils that we have to try to find, of course. Then you have various hand sanitisers at each polling place and the extra staff, as I have mentioned before. We will also need a fairly comprehensive communications plan because, again, I want to make sure that every elector can walk in satisfied with the integrity of our process and can also feel safe in coming to a polling place.

In answer to your question, we do not have the final amount yet nor will I have for at least another four weeks but it will be in the vicinity of \$1 million to \$1.5 million on top of the current budget that we have been provided.

Mr PICTON: As was referenced earlier, the fact that this is going to be a busy 18 months in terms of state, federal and local elections I am sure adds to the complexity and difficulties as well. What additional planning has been put in place to manage that?

Mr SHERRY: We are entering this election with four challenges. We have mentioned COVID-19, of course. We have mentioned the timing of the federal election, which in itself is a significant issue for us because there is a possibility, if you like, if the federal election is called for any date in March, our election will be put back three weeks. We have to rebook venues. We have to ensure staff are available to work three weeks later. It is a massive body of work, so we have contingency planning in place.

The third of the four issues we did not have last time was cybersecurity and misinformation, so we are spending a lot of time in that space. Of course, we are looking forward to parliament finalising their deliberations on the legislation because we are coming to a point when we need some closure on that so that we can work out what we have to play with moving forward.

Mr PICTON: In relation to the state and federal elections, you mentioned that there were planning and redundancy in place. Will you essentially book venues for 9 April or thereabouts, or will it be done if we get to that time and there will be a scramble to try to book places?

Mr SHERRY: No, we book them well in advance of the election date. We are fortunate here that we have an arrangement with the education department. We use schools, which are at no cost

to us, but importantly they are fairly new, modern facilities that have accessibility requirements, so that is a good arrangement for South Australia in general.

The issue is having to delay everything for three weeks. A lot of these venues may not be available in three weeks' time. The challenge is with the federal election: it is the Prime Minister's discretion as to when he calls it. There is sometimes only 33 days' notice. It does not allow a lot of time for us to respond.

I can assure you that the commission is fully alive to this challenge. We have a whole range of contingency plannings in place in order to deal with this, but I must say it is not going to be easy. It will come at a cost because one of the major challenges is the advertising, for example. You have to book places well in advance. To then postpone it by three weeks, a lot of the traditional television commercials are simply not going to be available, so we are having to look for other methods to communicate with the electors of South Australia about voting options, voting places, etc.

Mr PICTON: How do you coordinate with the AEC in terms of booths and advertising and staffing when there will be potentially elections in very close proximity?

Mr SHERRY: A very important question. I used to work with the AEC, so I have some very good relationships that are built there. I must say the AEC has been very much on board in a partnership arrangement. I meet regularly with the manager of the South Australian office here as well as the AEC commissioner in Canberra. Both organisations are very aware of the implications, if you like, of having these two elections in close proximity.

We work together and we meet regularly. We are looking at identifying the same polling places where appropriate just to avoid, of course, any elector confusion. They themselves will not know when the election will be called, so they are in a state of preparedness as it is. We engage in relation to polling officials. Although the legislation is subtly different there are some challenges there, but the bottom line is we are working very, very close with the AEC.

Mr PICTON: Is there any potential to share resources? You talk about schools for polling day, etc., but I know there are obviously a lot of voting centres and pre-poll centres and things like that. Is there the potential to share those rentals for the duration?

Mr SHERRY: Not really. In relation to the early voting centres, they have their own requirements. Even though it is a traditional voting place, of course there is all the office and infrastructure out the back. We are increasing the number of early voting centres that we had last time. I think we had 21 last time. We are going to increase it to approximately 47. This is in recognition of the elector demand for more convenient voting options.

Importantly, noting what has taken place in Queensland and WA, as the Attorney has mentioned, early voting has increased significantly. I have some figures here that indicate that it has gone up I think to about 43 per cent in WA, and that is a significant amount. Our equivalent of early voting was about 10 per cent. We are expecting a significant increase in electors wanting to vote early to avoid the crowds on polling day and also in postal voting.

Mr PICTON: In relation Budget Paper 4, Volume 2, page 17, the completed enrolment and nomination phases for the conduct of the three-yearly general elections for the APY Executive Board, the APY Act requires the Electoral Commission to promote the election itself. What work does the Electoral Commission do to encourage people to nominate for the APY Executive elections beyond simply declaring nominations open?

Mr SHERRY: It is a challenge conducting elections up in the APY lands, for a range of obvious reasons. We are fortunate we have some great relationships with the APY Executive Board themselves, as well as a lot of key organisations up there. We do our traditional radio advertising and we do a number of posters which we very carefully translate into the appropriate language the electors up there can understand. The voting is actually taking place this Wednesday. There will be a number of supplementary elections that we will have to conduct because we did not get enough nominations, and we are planning to do those very shortly. It has always been a challenge to get a number of people to nominate.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: If I might just add for the committee that, in addition to the APY lands election, which is scheduled for this month here in August, there is also the Super SA, Funds SA and Super Select board elections in September this year.

Mr PICTON: So if it is not the Electoral Commission, is there a part of government that is responsible for promoting nominations and building the capacity of people to nominate?

Mr SHERRY: The board themselves do a lot of promotion up there. We try to get up there as much as possible. In fact, I had a trip planned, but it had to be cancelled due to the COVID issues at the moment. The board themselves do a lot of promotion, taking into consideration the logistical challenges of how diverse the area is up there. I am quite comfortable with the number of nominations we have received, although it would have been good to get a few more on this particular occasion.

Mr PICTON: I refer back to pages 14 and 15 in relation to planning for the 2022 election. I understand you do an analysis of the previous election and other elections. Have you looked in terms of the number of polling booths, and whether there are particular small polling booths, and have there been any decisions to change or close any of those?

Mr SHERRY: It is my preference we do not close any polling places. The main reason for that is that over the years electors have become familiar with their polling place, and we certainly do not want to cause any confusion—but also to balance that up with careful use of the budget that we have provided to ensure, basically, that a polling place is able to service a reasonable number of electors.

We are just in the last stage of finalising our polling places for the 2022 state election. It is unlikely at this stage that we will be reducing the number of polling places. In fact, I can say here, as I have mentioned previously, we will be increasing the number of polling places to cater for the increase in demand for early voting. That will increase from the 21 we had in 2018 to about 47 polling places to cover early voting. That is, to aim to have one early voting centre in each district across the state.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Can I just add one other matter for the committee's benefit, and that is that of course we have the Electoral Districts Boundaries Commission report each four years, after each election, and boundaries do change, as members here in the house would be familiar with. The location that is necessary for polling booths is one thing, but it is also a question of whether they might traverse near a boundary or a new boundary and whether they then change their flavour to become a single or a joint polling booth. That is another factor that needs to be considered and taken into account by the commission.

Mr PICTON: You said it is not your preference to close polling booths, but are there any that will be closing for the forthcoming election compared to—

Mr SHERRY: I have not made my final decision on that as yet. Certainly, as I said, my preference is not to close any at all, but there may be some. We go to every polling place we are intending to use just to make sure it is accessible to elderly people, people with wheelchairs, etc. There could be building works that have taken place since the last election. A particular polling place may no longer be available anymore. So we have to go through a process of inspecting all these polling places just to make sure (1) they are available and (2) they are suitable.

I will just reiterate that it is not my intention to decrease the number of polling places for the next election. There might be one or two that are hard to justify because of low numbers taken from the previous election, but that will only be on the basis that there will be a polling place nearby that can service all the electors.

Mr PICTON: Is it correct that, until this point, there has not been an election day polling booth opened on the APY lands, and, if that is the case, are you looking to open one there for the forthcoming election?

Mr SHERRY: Let me reflect on that. For 2018, we spent considerable time and resources organising voting services up in the APY lands. I went up there on two occasions just to understand the challenges, and the first challenge we identified was enrolment. We had to make sure we had every eligible elector on the roll so they were entitled to vote. We organised a terrific strategy with

TAFE and that was to get people up on the lands to participate in a particular TAFE course that was all about filling out an enrolment form.

As a result of that undertaking, we put a whole lot of people on the roll or we updated their enrolment details. So we increased the roll in the APY lands significantly because of that undertaking, leading up to the last state election. We are repeating that strategy again. We had more voting time up in the APY lands because the feedback from the community was not to go to every little small place for one hour and then fly to the next place. They thought that was a disservice.

Their preference was for us to go to the larger communities and spend more time there, in particular, go to a larger community, which has a general store because the people will come in from the outlying communities into the bigger place. So you pick the day they are likely to come into the store and you are likely to get more people participating. We listened, and we did exactly that.

You mentioned before about setting up a polling place on polling day. We did not in 2018; I am not intending to do it again, although we are still finalising those details. Instead, we will focus on the early voting period for a considerable time, like we did in 2018.

Mr PICTON: There are a significant number of votes, though, on the APY lands. I certainly commend the work that the commission did last time, but if you look at the Far North mobile 1 booth, it had 1,438 votes, and Far North mobile 2 vote booth had 2,254 votes. Each one was open for a particular couple hours in the lead-up to the election, but with no polling day booth open for 10 hours on election day in the same way as in metropolitan Adelaide or other country locations; whereas there are at least a dozen booths across the state I can find where there are fewer than 100 votes, and we are keeping those booths open. I am not advocating closing them, but why would we not look at establishing on election day at least one polling booth on the APY lands in addition to all that other work?

Mr SHERRY: Remote polling is a significant logistical challenge. There are the challenges of distance and how we are going to get people into all the communities in the remote area. It is just not practicable to set up polling places in every community around the lands for eight hours at a time, as you would normally expect with a polling place in, say, a metropolitan area. All our polling places are done in consultation with the community up there about the best time and the best location.

Following that advice—and I am hoping my deputy has some statistics he can grab for me—there were certainly a lot more votes taken at the 2018 election up in the APY lands because of the strategies we put in place after feedback from the community, so we are intending on following that again. One thing we will be doing—and I will probably do it myself—is to go up there again, sit back and listen to the community about what are the best voting options for them and then we will respond accordingly.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I might add briefly that the extra challenge of living in a COVID-19 environment has been one of considerable interest to our Indigenous communities, and the APY lands is no exception. There are obviously many others; I think there are 19 across the state. Most of them elected to request the commonwealth to invoke the powers under the Biosecurity Act to restrict access in and out of their particular homelands, for obvious reasons. They were very concerned about that.

The accumulation of people in one area and the introduction of others coming in and out of the lands could create some significant health risk for them. I reiterated in the opening statement the reference to the fact that we are still living within a COVID-19 environment. Whilst all sorts of actions can be taken in relation to vaccination of populations and the like, where special provision has been made for our Indigenous lands, there is the risk that we are facing an election day when it would be problematic to bring large numbers of people together in one or two locations to be able to vote.

I think it is excellent that the commissioner and his team are working towards providing some safe options as to how we ensure that democracy prevails for the election in 2022 in circumstances where we minimise the risk to health of the general public. I thank him in advance for that. I think the committee would agree that giving people the option to be able to come to a polling booth and cast their vote is an important act in our democratic circumstances, but what is also important is that we offer options that enable the most vulnerable in our community to be protected in the health

environment. It is a challenge, but I place on the record my appreciation to the commissioner and his team for working out how we might do that to make sure that our most vulnerable are protected.

Mr PICTON: I certainly thank the commission for their work, but having a polling booth or multiple polling booths that open for longer hours would actually reduce that risk of people coming together all at the one time. As I understand what is happening, you have mobile booths that are only open for a certain period of time in certain locations, which everybody has to go to at that point, whereas in other communities obviously there are 10 hours of polling on polling day.

I am not quite sure I follow the logic or if that is based on particular health advice that the Attorney is relying upon, but obviously this is something where there are thousands of people who live on the APY lands and we have significant numbers of other remote booths that presumably have some of the remote difficulties that the commissioner was referring to.

From my perspective, I would have thought that this is something to look at to see whether we could make sure that there is an equitable basis upon which people can vote on election day, particularly given that the act says that our aim is to make sure that that can happen. Does the Attorney or the commissioner believe that there is currently an equitable basis in terms of people being able to vote on election day on the APY lands?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Can I just assure the committee that as a government we will do everything we can to support the commission to provide options for people across South Australia, including on the APY lands, to safely undertake their democratic right to vote. Whether that is on election day or before election day, via telephone or postal vote application, these are the sorts of options we have to look at. It may be that we come to March 2022 and a community—it may not just be the APY lands—is very worried about the access of anyone coming onto the lands and that some action is taken to be able to provide an alternate to that.

We do need to consider, at the request of both the health department and of course the people living in these communities—who I just remind the committee were very worried during the period of the opening of this coronavirus pandemic and had sought the support and protection under the Biosecurity Act for reasons of protecting their own, and we respect that. If any members of the committee have views as to how we might better provide a service I would invite them to forward them to the commissioner and I am sure he will give them consideration.

The CHAIR: We have reached the allotted time, but I have a question from the chair—and forgive me, Attorney, if we have already covered off on this—to you or you may refer it to the commissioner. We talked about the possibility of a state and federal election occurring concurrently. My question refers to our state election being pencilled in for 18 March. What would the situation be if a federal election were called on the 12th or the 26th or, for that matter, 2 April? What happens to the time frames if it is a week previous or a week post our due date?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: This was a consideration a couple of elections ago, I think, when both Tasmania and South Australia were due to have their elections on the same day. Was it the 2014 election? I think it might have been.

The CHAIR: Which we have done in the past.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: There was speculation then about the federal government coming in, so it was one we had a look at, at the time. As it turns out in the cycle of things, it is entirely up to the Prime Minister as to when they might call an election nationally.

The CHAIR: Yes, I understand that.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: But if they call it any time during the month of March, not just on the third Saturday, then the provisions of the constitution come into play and we would need to have our election held within the next 21 days—that is, three weeks—from our normal date. That is as I understand it and that is why I outlined that to the committee. Apparently, we cannot bring it forward, so we could not have it in February if there were an indication of their announcing sometime in March that they would have an election, but it would be taken out up to three weeks past that time.

If it was in early March, the commissioner might say, 'I think we need to go to the Governor and get it sorted to move to a date on 2 or 9 April perhaps,' as a means of being able to work out

how we could be sufficiently distant from that election. Obviously, federal elections take the attention of the public for that election, and the concept here was to ensure that—as I understand it, when the Constitution Act was providing this—there would be sufficient oxygen and separation from the state election. Confusion to the public is one aspect, but you also have two separate agencies that are conducting these elections—the Australian Electoral Commission for the federal election and our own commission, the South Australian commission, to undertake ours.

It is there for the reason that it can occur. To the best of my knowledge, it has not, but we have only had mandatory elections—when I say 'mandatory' I should say fixed election dates—I am pretty sure it was the 2006 election. I came into the house in 2002, and that was the last 'pick a date' by a Premier, and we have had fixed dates ever since. That is where we are at, at the moment.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that clarification, Attorney. There being no further questions, I declare the examination of the proposed payments for the Electoral Commission of South Australia and the Administered Items for the Electoral Commission SA complete.

Membership:

Mr Odenwalder substituted for Mr Picton.

Departmental Advisers:

Mr D. Soulio, Commissioner, Consumer and Business Services, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr J. Chapman, Small Business Commissioner, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr A. Swanson, Chief Financial Officer, Attorney-General's Department.

Ms N. Kilvert, General Manager, Regulatory Services, Consumer and Business Services, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr D. Allison, Manager, Strategic Advice, Consumer and Business Services, Attorney-General's Department.

The CHAIR: The portfolio we are examining is that of Consumer and Business Services, and the Office of the Small Business Commissioner. The minister appearing is the Attorney-General. I advise members that the proposed payments for the Attorney-General's Department remain open for examination. I call on the Attorney to introduce her advisers and make a short statement, should she wish.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Thank you, Mr Chairman. To members of the committee, there are two offices today that are under consideration by you. To support that, I indicate that the Commissioner, Consumer and Business Services, Mr Dini Soulio, is to my right, and behind me is Mr John Chapman, who is our Small Business Commissioner, also the subject of your examination. I am quite happy to start with Mr Soulio, but if it is the wish of the committee we can start with Mr Chapman, either way.

Can I also indicate that Ms Nerissa Kilvert is behind me. She is the General Manager of Regulatory Services. Mr Damian Allison is the Manager of Strategic Advice, and Mr Andrew Swanson, whom I introduced to the committee earlier, is the Chief Financial Officer of the Attorney-General's Department.

I am pleased to say that both of these offices, both of small business and of Consumer and Business Services, have been invaluable to the government and, I think, to the people of South Australia during the COVID-19 era, which has now been over 12 months, in the provision of service to the community, relaxation of obligation in relation to payment of some expenses, and support through both bushfires and COVID-19. I particularly look behind me to the commissioner for small business. They have been exemplary. I thank both commissioners and their teams for the services that they have provided during that time.

The work that is being done is sometimes not given the most attention in the media, but the work done that helps to protect people either from eviction from a home or from paying onerous fees has been exemplary, and I thank both commissioners for their advice and support in this regard and the teams around it.

In addition to that, as regulatory bodies there has been quite a bit of legislation that has needed to be passed to support these agencies, so again they have been very active in this space, and our other agencies in the Attorney-General's Department have supported that. I place on the record my appreciation as Attorney-General for the services of these two commissioners.

The CHAIR: Does the lead speaker for the opposition wish to make a statement?

Ms MICHAELS: No, but I would like to thank both commissioners who are here today for their support during the COVID pandemic for small business and for various parties that you deal with, Commissioner Soulio. I will jump straight into questions.

The CHAIR: I invite questions.

Ms MICHAELS: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 28, in the highlights, in relation to the fuel price transparency scheme, if I can take you there, Attorney. Last year's budget provided \$1.2 million over two years. How much did the government spend on that project in the 2020-21 financial year and how much does the government anticipate spending in the 2021-22 year?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I do have some data on some of this. I do not think I have those specific amounts, but I am happy to take that on notice.

Ms MICHAELS: The trial was allocated one FTE in last year's budget. How many FTEs are currently being used to manage this trial right at the moment?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: The fuel pricing program?

Ms MICHAELS: Yes, fuel pricing.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: In addition to the one dedicated officer that you referred to, the compliance work is shared across some of our compliance officers.

Ms MICHAELS: In relation to that compliance work, can the Attorney advise how many complaints have been made against service stations during the trial period?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Yes, we do have some of that data, and I will invite the commissioner to give you an update on that.

Mr SOULIO: We received a number of complaints in relation to fuel price transparency, and we sent the necessary staff out to deal with those. We have had 220 complaints alleging noncompliance and we have issued 49 written warnings in relation to those.

Ms MICHAELS: Have there been any expiation notices issued, or is it just warnings at this stage?

Mr SOULIO: There have, yes. I will just find that number. No, I think at this stage it has only been warnings that we have issued. We have not issued any expiation notices. It has only been warnings through that period.

Ms MICHAELS: Attorney, can you advise if there have been any particular issues that are popping up more commonly in terms of the complaints?

Mr SOULIO: Sorry, can I clarify the previous answer. The answer was that we had two expiation notices issued.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: If we could go back to place on the record that this is a scheme that is a mandatory electronic lodgement of changes for fuel price and if you fail to do that you can be fined and of course warnings can be issued. There is power for the commissioner to be able to deal with minor matters. The obligation is therefore one to report, and the general tenor of complaints was the failure to do that within the time required, to advise of the change of fuel price.

I should just say that the whole purpose of this legislation is to implement a program where consumers can confidently turn up to a petrol station or a retail outlet and know that the advertised price they can see on an app is actually going to be the price they pay when they get there and that if they get there and find there has been an increase in the price from the time that they checked their app to the time that they arrived, and it breaches the obligation for timely provision of the update, then a complaint can follow. This is the concern that would be raised.

I am advised by CBS that there have been 220 complaints since the trial started of alleged noncompliance, with 49 resulting in written warnings. I am further advised that these were largely attributable to the initial implementation and that the complaint numbers are trending down. In the implementation, there were obviously a few nuggets to get through. You might recall that during the passage of this legislation we added in an amendment to the bill to ensure that the commissioner could exercise some discretion in relation to the action to be taken, because with a new regime we find that that can be understandable.

I am also advised that CBS had conducted over 255 proactive inspections of fuel retailers, with the latest blitz covering around 65 petrol stations over two days in May and June. I am pleased to hear from those inspections that 100 per cent of metropolitan fuel retailers were fully compliant. Only a few minor issues were picked up with some regional petrol stations, which I believe were mostly addressed on the spot.

I think it is fantastic that South Australians can have access to this technology now, can have reliable data, can choose to find the cheapest option available to them, in their local town or suburb or nearby, and be able to get the best possible prices. It has been a very important commitment of our government. Most importantly, it has translated to a cost-of-living benefit to consumers, and we are very proud of that.

I am told that, as of last Wednesday 28 July, *The Advertiser* published an article referring to a recent study conducted by the RAA of 600 fuel app users, which found that consumers, by comparing prices at petrol stations, will be saving an average of \$337 per year. I understand those figures are consistent with the latest ACCC quarterly report. Fueltrac, which supplies data to the ACCC, also publishes a quarterly report, which I am advised shows that Adelaide had the cheapest petrol over the last quarter.

Although the scheme is proving to be very popular and showing promising signs to relieve cost-of-living pressures in South Australia, it has only been in place for the last six months, so obviously we are looking at the program. In short, the scheme is meeting its goal. We look forward to the implementing of real-time fuel pricing on a more permanent basis, but we are committed to the trial and it is going well.

Ms MICHAELS: I take you to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 29, line 15, which refers to the FTEs for Consumer and Business Services. In 2019-20, actual FTEs was 222.8 and budgeted was 230.8. Can the minister advise why fewer staff were employed than were originally budgeted in that financial year?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I will invite the commissioner to explain the variation there.

Mr SOULIO: Generally, sometimes if we anticipate that we have savings that need to be met or we are looking at using technology, we may not fill a position. It depends on the nature of that position, but there are areas where we are not always at our capacity for positions. That might be that someone leaves and we decide not to fill that because we have budget savings for the year after, so bringing someone on for that period may not be necessary. That is sometimes where we will be under our FTE cap.

Ms MICHAELS: Is that the same reason for 2020-21 being under what was budgeted?

Mr SOULIO: Yes.

Ms MICHAELS: Is that despite in some cases not reaching the targets that were set for Consumer and Business Services?

Mr SOULIO: Areas where we might be aligning the actual FTE cap that we have may be one of the reasons why there is a reduction, but when you are talking about service delivery that will

depend on the area where the person is working, so they might not be in that same area and necessarily have transferable skills into a different area.

Ms MICHAELS: You would not be able to use that cap to allocate staff to the areas that are not meeting their targets?

Mr SOULIO: We can move staff around, but the issue in relation to where we have an actual number of staff—we might have a cap of FTE, but we might not have necessarily a budgeted number of staff. Our cap sometimes is higher than we have as budgeted staff numbers, if that makes sense. We may have a situation where we have a cap of a particular number, but we only have a budget that is under that, so we might reduce that cap to meet our actual budgeted numbers of staff, so they might be over that cap. There might be unfunded positions in that cap.

Ms MICHAELS: Have there been any complaints made by staff at CBS in relation to human resources issues—harassment, bullying, anything like that—in the 2020-21 financial year?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: We will take that on notice. CBS was also one of the agencies, through the I Work for SA survey, which completed its obligations in that regard. They have also been subject to the I Work for SA survey results, which from memory had an increase in the number of participants from 2018. As you know, we have done two surveys in this regard. CBS has very significant customer-facing focus obligations; in other words, it has direct contact with lots of consumers.

The survey showed that 89 per cent of the staff understood the purpose of their role, 93 per cent of staff can see how what they do contributes to our strategic objectives and 85 per cent of our staff are willing to go the extra mile. Improvements have been seen overall since the last survey, in particular in leadership in a number of areas, focused on continuous improvement or areas of focus around job security and workload—management workload pressure.

It is a pleasing response from the workforce generally, but obviously there are still always areas of improvement. We are very proud of introducing the survey process so that as a government, as the employers, the workforce have a very clear say. We have charted the survey to the extent of it being commissioned, so there is a very broad number of KPIs or areas that we see as important for a healthy, happy and safe workforce.

More specifically, for those who might feel aggrieved that in some way they were subject to bullying or harassment, one of the important indicators in this survey was whether the individual employee felt that their concerns, when raised with management, were followed through. This is another key indicia to an employer, in our case the government, to ensure that we are really alert to a circumstance where someone may be vulnerable in that situation.

I do not think there is anything further I can add. In relation to the specific number of claims that have been made in this area, I am happy to take that on notice.

Ms MICHAELS: There was a question in the I Work for SA survey which was about how many staff intended to leave within 12 months, and I think there was a follow-up question of within two years. In relation to CBS staff, do you have that number there in front of you?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I do not, and the commissioner is indicating that he does not have it here, but I am happy to take it on notice.

Ms MICHAELS: Do you have any concerns about staff morale or any areas that you think need to be improved at Consumer and Business Services as a result of that survey?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: There are a couple that I just indicated where I think there is room for improvement.

Ms MICHAELS: What steps will you be taking to improve those areas?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: The chief executive, Ms Caroline Meador, who appeared in the committee a little earlier, is now undertaking the task the government has asked of her, and that is to meet with each head of the units within her department—and this is one unit that Commissioner Soulio is head of—so that all of these measures can be discussed and they can work out the strategies so that improvement can be gained between now and the next survey. This is important,

shining sunlight as a disinfectant in this area that we feel needs to be followed through, and we are absolutely committed to doing that.

In the circumstance where there has been a spotlight placed on those for safety in the workplace, and harassment and bullying have obviously had a lot of attention, there is also the importance of ensuring that our workplaces provide an environment for advancement and gender equity. These are all matters that are important to me and our government to ensure that we provide the best environment possible. They are all matters that will continue to be under scrutiny.

Ms MICHAELS: Attorney, can I take you to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 28. There is a target of conducting a review of the Associations Incorporation Act. When do you anticipate that review will commence, and how long do you think that review will take?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: As the member may be aware, the 1985 act provides for the incorporation, administration and regulation of associations in South Australia. Associations operate in the not-for-profit sector and are eligible for incorporation if they are formed by one or more purposes specified in the act. The act has not been the subject of a comprehensive review since 1997.

Reform is required to enhance the operation of the act. That has happened, and a draft bill has now been circulated for comment to interested stakeholders. The proposed reforms aim to strike a balance between the three key themes of support, oversight and regulation. It is our intention to progress these much-needed reforms as a priority. I gave notice of the bill to the parliament when we last met, some date earlier in July. When we resume on 24 August, I expect that some time that week I will formally introduce it. So, yes, it has happened.

I have no doubt that the member is familiar with the provision under the current act, probably more so than many in our parliament, and I hope she will agree that it has been in much need of attention. Sometimes just the experience of something like COVID-19 throws a spotlight on some of the weaknesses of our legislation in being able to operate during a time when we have needed to have not just a modernisation of the provisions of something like the Associations Incorporation Act, but also what are the rules as to how it would be administered.

It is a body of work that has been done. There has been consultation with stakeholders, and within the next couple of weeks I will propose that it be formally introduced, and I invite the member's contribution on any aspect of that bill, as I appreciate her experience in that regard.

Ms MICHAELS: Yes, I will look forward to it. It is long overdue. I turn to page 30, Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, the activity indicators. CBS projected that there would be 33,000 requests for residential tenancy advice finalised in 2020-21, yet there were only 23,300 finalised. Can you give me an idea of why that reduction?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Sorry, can you point out where it is under the activity indicators?

Ms MICHAELS: Line 16, number of requests for residential tenancy advice finalised.

The CHAIR: The bottom line, Attorney, on page 30; is that right?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Here we are: number of requests for residential tenancy advice finalised.

Ms MICHAELS: We had projections of 33,000 and an estimated result of 23,300, so about a third down on what was expected.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am advised that CBS estimated a 30 per cent reduction in residential tenancy advice requests being finalised from the original 2020-21 projection, and CBS has also estimated a 20 per cent reduction in fair trading advice requests being finalised from the original 2020-21 projections.

So in both those areas my advice is that due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 there has been an increase in demand for both residential tenancies and fair trading advice. The matter has proven to be more complex with other contributing factors that must be taken into account, which can lead to longer call times, particularly around how COVID-19 has impacted the residential tenancy, and whether emergency protections introduced by the government or other policy

supporting the sector apply to the caller's circumstances, and also travel and hospitality contacts impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, often requiring consideration of related frustrated contracts legislation in addition to the Australian Consumer Law.

This has led to an overall reduction in matters that were finalised, which correlates with the number of requests received, as there is not a particularly large backlog. Due to the nature of these requests being in person or by phone, post or email, they are generally actioned expeditiously—for example, a call seeking advice will not require further work to finalise.

If it helps, there is some further information. I can tell you that CBS has also reviewed its dispute resolution processes and is currently trialling a new model with respect to triaging matters requiring compulsory conciliation. As a result, CBS is projecting an around 70 per cent increase in matters referred for compulsory conciliation in 2021-22.

Again, I just commend CBS. They have been very committed to a high level of customer service to both consumers and tenants to help educate, inform and resolve disputes. I am also advised that the commissioner continues to engage with his interstate counterparts and is contributing to a review of the Australian Consumer Law learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic.

There was no question that it was an important announcement of the Prime Minister that we should do everything we can to try to protect people during COVID-19 from being either evicted from their residential tenancies and/or facing an unreasonable request to increase rent or obligations in relation to this area. We have acted on that as quickly as possible. Thankfully, the parliament here supported us having these initiatives and CBS have played a very active role in that area.

I am happy to answer any further questions in relation to the Small Business Commissioner and the role that he and his team played in relation to commercial tenancies, which has been particularly important for small business, and the support that we have also had for some of those, which have ultimately gone to the Magistrates Court for determination. The member may be aware that, in relation to that, there was a structure established to ensure that there needed to be mandated mediation, essentially, and a certificate issued by the Small Business Commissioner if he considered it was reasonable for the matter, not having been resolved, to be able to go to the Magistrates Court. Some of those have been dealt with.

There was a judgement delivered in one of those cases. From memory, the Small Business Commissioner provided a briefing on this. A copy of the judgement suggested that there should be equal contribution to the loss between landlord and tenant in that regard. I think that has served as an effective tool in supporting the mediation team run by the Small Business Commissioner and the resolution of these matters since. Hopefully, that has been instrumental in minimising the number of cases that go on to the Magistrates Court.

As a result of these efforts, firstly we have minimised the residential cohort and the reduction going through the SACAT processes and, similarly, reduced disputes going through the magistracy. Both have played a very active role in residential tenancy and commercial tenancy respectively.

Ms MICHAELS: Can I just take you back to the start of the answer. Just to clarify in my own mind, you said there was an increase in inquiries and an increase in complexity and therefore the reduction in requests finalised. At the same time, Consumer and Business Services has not accessed their full amount of FTEs that was budgeted for?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Yes. I am happy to ask the commissioner to explain that.

Mr SOULIO: I think I need to clarify that the discussion is in relation to the cap. The reduction in the cap is where we have an FTE cap on the number of people I can hire into the organisation. To clarify that, the cap is the number of FTE staff I can engage into the organisation. Where that may not align with the actual budgeted number of people is where that cap reduction comes in. I might have a cap that allows me to have, for example, 250 people, but I am only budgeted for 247 people.

I would bring that cap down for three because it covers the three who are not effectively funded, if that makes sense. Where the cap and the budget do not align is where that adjustment came from. We do have areas where we do not necessarily fill vacancies immediately, as I talked

about before, but that figure you are looking at now is in relation to adjusting the cap down to match the number of people I am budgeted for, if that makes sense.

Ms MICHAELS: For that to be the situation, do I read into that that there are a greater number of people at higher salaries, and therefore at management level, than there are frontline staff?

Mr SOULIO: No, it is funded positions versus actual dollars. It is funded positions versus the cap, so it is not a matter of salaries being spent on higher-level people; it is more that the funded positions may not align with the actual cap that I have been allotted or can have. It is not necessarily a dollar for cap amount; it is the funded positions versus the cap that may not align.

Ms MICHAELS: Am I to get an extra five minutes, Mr Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes, certainly. In fact, we are not scheduled to finish this particular session until 4.45pm.

Ms MICHAELS: I have questions for the Small Business Commissioner as well and I am trying to allocate my time efficiently.

The CHAIR: We have had half an hour now. It is up to you whether you would like to go to the Small Business Commissioner now.

Ms MICHAELS: I may ask a couple more questions of Consumer and Business Services.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Ms MICHAELS: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 30, line 14, activity indicators. This shows that the number of residential tenancy bonds lodged is projected to be 60,000 in 2021-22. It appears that bond refunds are taking longer than the targets are. Can you explain the delay in bond refunds?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Yes, I thought I had started to do that; perhaps I did not make it clear. I will invite the commissioner to make it more clear.

Mr SOULIO: The tenancies advice versus the lodgement of bonds, is that the question you are covering off on?

Ms MICHAELS: Yes.

Mr SOULIO: Obviously, there has been a delay in some of the processing work. We anticipate that that will come back down. We are going through some work to try to ensure that people are getting their bonds refunded as quickly as possible. There had been a significant increase in relation to bond refunds through that period, so that is where part of that delay has come from. Again, that was anticipated to increase to an additional five working days.

There has been a significant increase in applications in the second half of the financial year, particularly February to April, and, due to COVID and less mobility within the sector, the first half of the financial year. We have seen an increase in the requests for bond lodgements and refunds, and that is why it is taking us longer to process them.

What we are seeing more of is a number of disputed bonds, and that is taking more time and more effort to resolve. Disputes between the landlord and the tenant about the division of the bond are having an impact in relation to that. We are seeing more of those, so it is taking longer at the moment.

Ms MICHAELS: Attorney, are additional resources being put into that, given how critical it is for bonds to be refunded quickly for people to be able to move in the environment that we have right now, with such an inflated market in terms of residential tenancies?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am glad the member has raised this, because it is important that we ensure that whoever is rightfully entitled to the bond money gets it as quickly as possible, whether it is the landlord, to remedy damage or the general condition of the property when it is received back, or whether it is the tenant who needs to have that money to be able to get to the next

property. More often than not, unless they are moving to a circumstance where they are not renting, this is something that is important.

There is clearly a high demand for rental properties, and there is also a very significant financial impact on tenants who are really in a poorer circumstance. They simply need access to this money. As the member is aware, there are a number of circumstances where someone in a very poor circumstance getting emergency accommodation and the like sometimes has access to agencies who can pay the bond for them, so they are not actually having to pay it themselves.

There are those in the community who can afford to have other funds available to them. It is those people in the middle who really are the ones hard hit when it comes to needing that money to be able to pay for their transport costs and put money into the next bond, etc. We are very keen to try to ensure, as much as possible, as quickly as possible, that these issues are resolved.

Ultimately, the determination of some of the disputes in this area are left to SACAT to make those decisions. That is, of course, a tribunal that is designed to be there for quick remedies as much as possible in this area. In addition to that, as a government we have also been asking the commissioner to look at how else we might secure property without having to pay bonds or how we might make these more streamlined.

It is important that we have some protective mechanism to protect the interests of both tenant and landlord. There are different models for these things that have been looked at and which the commissioner is still considering. In the meantime, we have a system and we try to activate a quick resolution of the dispute via the tribunal, if it has to go that far, otherwise the commission provides for that.

What is being indicated is that there has been an increase in the number of disputes between landlord and tenant as to who is to get that money. Factors such as an agreement that some money be refunded but a portion of it is in dispute and how we might better facilitate the resolution of the balance as distinct from the whole lot having to go through a dispute resolution are all matters to consider.

COVID has been a difficult time for many tenants and we are keen to support them into the new accommodation where they need it, and also obviously for landlords, who are very keen to ensure that their property continues to provide them with a return, which is often their only income for support. We are conscious of both ends of that. I invite the commissioner to add anything further, if he thinks he can help.

Mr SOULIO: One of the things that keeps being raised with us is the bond portability issue, people moving from one property to the next and for some people having to carry a four or six-week bond, waiting for that refund, and that is why we have put on more temps to try to get through those numbers. The idea of moving out of a place, waiting for your four or six-week bond and having to pay a bond at the next place and carry that eight or 12-week bond, even for two or three weeks, is hard for people. Is there a way that we can say, 'We have a bond sitting with us on that property. You are moving there and we will transfer the bond across?' We will try to explore those things as options as well.

The CHAIR: I am in your hands, member for Enfield, but it might be a good time to go to the Small Business Commissioner.

Ms MICHAELS: Yes, please.

The CHAIR: Attorney, do we need to shuffle?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: We do. Commissioner Soulio is going to shuffle back and Commissioner Chapman is going to shuffle forward.

The CHAIR: Welcome, Mr Chapman.

Ms MICHAELS: Can I take you to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 61, line 31, which is the Office of the Small Business Commissioner. Can you advise how many complaints the Small Business Commissioner has received in relation to late payments of accounts by GFG Alliance in the 2020-21 year?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: What is the reference number again? Page 61?

Ms MICHAELS: Page 61, that is intragovernment transfers, which is probably the wrong reference.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: There is reference on that page at the last line to Office of the Small Business Commissioner.

Ms MICHAELS: Yes, that is it.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: On intragovernment transfers.

Ms MICHAELS: No, sorry, not that line. The Office of the Small Business Commissioner, in—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: The Small Business Commissioner is indicating in any event he may need to take that matter on notice, so I am happy to just record that. I am not taking issue with the reference to the Small Business Commissioner under intragovernmental transfers, but the Small Business Commissioner is here and he has an important job to do, and it looks as though we might have some information that is available.

In relation to that matter, I am now advised there were 60 inquiries for the 2020-21 year and 40 inquiries for the 2019-20 year. At our regular meetings, the Small Business Commissioner would give me an update in relation to that matter. Obviously, I think every South Australian is optimistic or would like to be optimistic in relation to the ongoing work in Mr Gupta's operations.

Most importantly—but not the only issue, of course—has been the assurance that any cashflow issues that might reflect or provide a legacy in the negative to small business operators within the region have been a priority. The Small Business Commissioner has regularly kept me informed as to how he has supported the negotiations with the management of Mr Gupta's operation to ensure that they are regularly paid. I think an agreement was struck to ensure that all outstanding regular invoicing was to be paid within 60 days.

Mr CHAPMAN: Sixty-two.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Sixty-two days, actually.

Ms MICHAELS: Does that involve mediations of disputes?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Sorry?

Ms MICHAELS: Has that involved any actual mediations?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: No, the figures I just gave you related to inquiries.

Ms MICHAELS: So there have not been necessarily any increases in complaints of late payments since?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Not that I am aware of. As I say, Mr Chapman has kept me fully briefed as to the general compliance. In addition to ensuring that local people who provided goods and services were promptly paid—I will just see if there is any other information I think might be helpful there—I am also advised that the Small Business Commissioner has assisted businesses in securing interest-free loans from the state government in 2016 and in their refinancing in 2019.

There is a lot of history here in relation to Greensill and everything else, but I am sure the member and the committee are familiar with what has happened in this regard. With the refinancing arrangements, obviously there is an air of optimism in relation to how this operation and GFG will continue.

But what is very important to our government—and I think the commissioner has been very supportive in this regard—is to make sure that along the way, firstly, all the relevant players in Whyalla are kept informed, and that includes the local state member, the mayor and others, who all have a vested interest in ensuring that their community is secure in the employment at GFG because that is critical.

In addition to that, the Whyalla steelworks are providing a commodity that is very important for the economy of our state and indeed Australia. The Prime Minister has made it very clear that he is looking to have some sovereignty in this area and has maintained policy directions to try to ensure that we are mindful of this and that we are also in the business of ensuring that we have structural steel available, not just for our housing industry and projects and things which I am sure members are familiar with but also to make sure that we provide to the people of Whyalla and environs our government's commitment to the importance of the industry in that region. The Whyalla steelworks are a very significant part of that.

Ms MICHAELS: I think the budget reference I had was probably the correct one. I assume that intragovernmental transfer is a transfer to fund the Office of the Small Business Commissioner. So I think that is the right budget reference.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Sorry, I thought you were asking in relation to the other item, but that is fine.

Ms MICHAELS: In relation to the small business COVID grants, the \$10,000 grants that the government has had and the recent \$3,000 one, how many inquiries has the Small Business Commissioner received?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I will ask the commissioner to give some detail in that regard in a moment. But can I just say that the significance of supporting small business through COVID will have had a very important role, on reflection when we look at all this, of ensuring that having provided that support we avoided disaster for many people.

I certainly have received, and I know the Premier has received, letters and emails of appreciation to be able to have had this support to keep people going, to pay the rent, pay their insurance, pay employees where it is necessary and pay for their own livelihood to be able to keep their small business going during this time. I think it is fair to say that treasurers are not known for their generosity, and frankly ours is no exception, so I was very pleased to see in this year's budget his acceptance of the need for this project to continue.

So in the last round that we have had with the \$3,000 grants, this is an extra provision which our own Treasurer has accepted is important and has announced in this budget. So there has been special provision to continue the role of the small business office of Mr Chapman to support that and to continue it because we feel that there is still a need, as a government, and the Treasurer has supported that. In relation to specific numbers of cases, I will invite the commissioner to provide that to the committee.

Mr CHAPMAN: Thank you, Attorney. In relation to the number of requests that we received in the last financial year, it was a total of 58. In each of those matters, I corresponded with the Treasurer's office or indeed the Department of Treasury and Finance, who were responsible for the administration of the grant process. We were successful in 12 of the cases and unsuccessful in 46.

Ms MICHAELS: Were you successful in any that missed the deadline, which I have had in my electoral office?

Mr CHAPMAN: In terms of the issue of the deadline, the Treasurer was very firm. If the applications had not been lodged by the due date, they were refused. Despite writing numerous letters to the Treasurer seeking his forbearance, he did not move from that position.

Ms MICHAELS: Attorney, do you have any concerns with that position? I had one in my electoral office that missed it by a day and could not get an extension.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: These are matters you could directly take up with the Treasurer. I am not sure of the familiar circumstances of the member's constituent. What always happens with any kind of supplement, whether it is to an individual worker—and, of course, the federal government was active in that space in providing JobKeeper and JobSeeker—there were casual employees and others who missed out.

In relation to the business support, a time frame was set to try to encourage people to come forward, present their material and lodge it within a certain time frame. I think in fairness it was a

fairly generous time frame, but without knowing the particulars of the individual case that the member has raised I could not comment.

But it is difficult because there is always a cut-off with these things. Some will complain that some people get a benefit during a crisis that they should not have been entitled to and that they have exploited a weakness in the rules that set something up which means that somebody has received a benefit that they should not have. On the other hand, there are those who miss out. So that is the nature of grant systems and that is what we are left with.

Certainly, there have been a number of initiatives that we have either continued or extended, and this is actually one of them where we have continued it. Special provision has been made for the Small Business Commissioner to continue in that role to support the grant application availability for this next round.

Whether they qualify, whether there is a time limit or whether, in fact, they are unsuccessful not because they are out of time but because they simply have not produced the data to support that they made a loss—which is a very generalised statement, but I think you understand the nature of that—it is one thing to say that your business has made a loss in the sense of revenue, but obviously there are other matters on the other side of the ledger that need to be considered. So these are matters that are part of the process, and some miss out and some are successful. Certainly, for those businesses that have received benefit, whether it is this grant or whether it is other benefits, it has been a lifesaver and it has meant they have been able to get through.

There are a number of other small businesses—I know some of them have raised issues directly with me—that have gone from having a small number of staff to a couple who operate their local cafe by themselves through this COVID time. They have had a downturn, they managed to become a bit more multiskilled and go back to doing the cooking as well as ordering the supplies, etc., and they just keep going. There are different ways that people have managed that, but it has been a struggle for a lot of people. We are mindful of that, and we are appreciative of the Small Business Commissioner in supporting those people through it.

Ms MICHAELS: I understand this might be the commissioner's last estimates; is that correct?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Yes. I think there has been a statement made publicly by the commissioner that he will not be continuing after the expiry of his term. I have gone on the public record on behalf of our government to express our appreciation for the years of service that he has given this role.

Ms MICHAELS: I would also like to thank the commissioner for that.

The CHAIR: It is mine, too, member for Enfield.

Ms MICHAELS: And I would like to thank you for your service, sir.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I was going to hold your praise until the end of the day, but if you are feeling a little bit outside of the spotlight I am more than happy to record my appreciation to you, sir, for the many years of service in chairing these committees.

The CHAIR: We do not need to go there now, Attorney, but perhaps Mr Chapman and I can catch up later next year. Back to estimates, member for Enfield.

Ms MICHAELS: May I ask if the Attorney has commenced the recruitment process to fill the role?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Consideration is being given to that.

Ms MICHAELS: Will that be a publicly advertised process?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: That is yet to be determined.

Ms MICHAELS: When would you expect to announce a new commissioner?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: When that process has been confirmed and undertaken.

Ms MICHAELS: Can I take the commissioner to the commercial leasing support during COVID, Budget Paper 5, page 11. An amount of \$198,000 was provided for the 2020-21 financial year for mediation services for commercial leasing disputes. Is any of that funding to be carried over for this year, or are more resources anticipated to be required if we continue to have these sorts of lockdowns that we have had?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Perhaps, to be quicker, I will ask the commissioner to explain the budget implications. On the same page, page 11, there is reference to the budget implications and then the commercial leasing support, so I will ask the commissioner to explain that as quickly as possible so we do not eat into the next session.

Mr SOULIO: In relation to the budget support, the Treasurer provided two additional allocations. One was \$160,000, which was included in the 2020-21 budget, and a further \$198,000 was provided to ensure that we could maintain a very high standard of service and manage the rather large volume of mediations and cases that we dealt with during that period.

Ms MICHAELS: Are you expecting the need for any additional resources required for the 2021-22 financial year, this current one?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: That has not been received at this point. What has been sought has been provided and we will see how we go. I am always hopeful that with the vaccination program we are going to see some changes to our lifestyle, hopefully by the end of the year. But, nevertheless, we have to be alert to it. This has been an area where we have felt it was important, given that there were a number of cases still left to be resolved, to have a chance to have those resolved without resorting to going to the Magistrates Court to have court determinations. That submission was presented as being appropriate and meritorious and the Treasurer agreed, so extra money has been provided.

If we need more after that, that will be another matter that we can consider in due course. Mr Chapman has just provided to me what is in progress. There are 32 cases in progress, 56 have been closed off with assistance, 46 have been unsuccessful and 298 have been successful. Well done; that is a 74.5 per cent success rate, according to the mathematics of Mr Chapman, which I am sure is infallible.

I think that speaks for itself. It has been an important process. It is also important, especially in a COVID circumstance, where you have landlords who are saying, 'We need to have this money. We can't afford to be providing free rent. We rely on this for our own income support,' and then on the other hand you have small businesses who are desperately in need of some relief to those fixed expenses. Rent is often, after the workforce, a very large component of commercial cost of a small business. We do understand that and we appreciate the work that has been done.

The CHAIR: Member for Enfield, I have committed to an extra five minutes. We will go until 4.50pm when the member for Kavel will adjourn, so if you would like to ask one or two more questions, depending on how we go.

Ms MICHAELS: You talked about the success in those resolutions. Is success defined as a result that both parties are happy with, or can you give a breakdown of what success is in terms of a tenant being able to remain in a property versus a landlord being successful?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Successful in the sense that it is noted as resolved and it does not need to go to the Magistrates Court, so it does not need a certificate to then go on to have it determined. I think it is fair to say that sometimes the resolution is that the tenant stays and that there is an agreed reduction in rent. Sometimes, as time goes by in events such as COVID, there is a reassessment by the small business proprietor as to the ongoing capacity for them to continue to run their business during these difficult times and they want to be able to move on and have relief from the obligation of the tenancy, for example, to enable the landlord to then go on to relet somewhere else.

There are lots of different circumstances that can be equated to a resolution, but it is the extent of the argument over the loss of rent—that is, the net that has not been paid and that would otherwise accrue as a debt—that has been in some way shared or resolved in any event. Again, I think is important to recognise that there are many landlords who try to do the right thing. Many have

provided some relief during the time of this COVID period; they have been very keen to keep good tenants in their premises and have been able to offer some relief, but they want some assurance of a future income stream.

So there are different capacities on both sides to provide that. Where possible, I think the Small Business Commissioner and his team have tried very hard to say, 'Let's just work out, in practical terms, how we can make this happen,' so that small business can continue to operate if they are able to do so and a landlord is able, within the envelope of affordability, to say, 'I can extend you this relief at this period of time, but I need to have an income stream after that.'

Bear in mind that for some landlords that has been quite a big sacrifice as well because it has not been easy for them to immediately secure another tenant. You can drive around in a COVID situation and see empty tenancies, and landlords are no doubt feeling the pinch. That is the situation we are in and we can only do the best we can. A 74.5 per cent success rate has been extraordinary, and we appreciate it.

The CHAIR: Having reached the allotted time, I declare the examination of the proposed payments for the portfolio agencies of Consumer and Business Services and the Office of the Small Business Commissioner complete.

Sitting suspended from 16:50 to 17:05.

Departmental Advisers:

Ms C. Mealor, Chief Executive, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr A. Swanson, Chief Financial Officer, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr M. Burdett, Acting Executive Director, Planning and Land Use Services, Attorney-General's Department.

Ms A. Hart, Director, Office of Local Government, Attorney-General's Department.

Ms K. Bartolo, Valuer-General, Office of the Valuer-General, Attorney-General's Department.

The CHAIR: Welcome back to Estimates Committee A. The portfolio that we will be examining this afternoon for the last session is the Office of Local Government, Outback Communities Authority, Local Government Grants Commission and Planning and Land Use Services. The minister appearing is the Minister for Planning and Local Government. I advise members that the proposed payments for the Attorney-General's Department remain open for examination. I call on the Attorney to introduce her advisers and make a statement, if she wishes.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I indicate to members of the committee that the gentleman to my right is Mr Michael Burdett, the Acting Executive Director of Planning and Land Use Services. As some of you may know, he is also our Surveyor-General in South Australia, which is a very important role in itself. I think today is his last day as acting executive director, but I thank him for his service during the past few weeks.

Behind me, apart from Ms Caroline Mealor, who I have introduced to the committee as the Chief Executive, AGD, and Mr Andrew Swanson, Chief Financial Officer, AGD, are two other very important people. Firstly, Ms Alex Hart, Director of the Office of Local Government which, for the benefit of members, also covers the Outback Communities Authority and Local Government Grants Commission matters, which are scheduled.

Ms Katherine Bartolo is the Valuer-General. Of course, she and her division have been in the media recently. It is pleasing, as we are coming through COVID, to see some land values increase for property across the state. That has been very comforting. The Registrar-General is also in the gallery. She plays an excellent role in relation to the regulation of land services. I must say, she has been an outstanding contributor Australia-wide to the development of the interoperability obligations that the ACCC have asked us to look at. She has been leading the charge, with her equivalent in New South Wales, in that regard.

I place on the record my appreciation to this department. I am a new minister. I am sure these departments are used to having ministers come and go and I am relatively new. I was brand spanking new last year at least at the Auditor-General's time. I think I just got estimates covering this area, but it has been an extraordinarily interesting new portfolio for me and I have really appreciated and valued the support of those around me leading the charge, who have been very effective in transferring to me, educating me and making sure that we continue to provide service in this area.

For the government, planning and land use is a critical area of the future of our state. I am very pleased that, along with the people here, together with the State Planning Commission, which is now led by Ms Helen Dyer, we are actually able to provide a leapfrogging transformation into the next decade. I look forward to that work being completed by the commission. With that, I am happy for the committee to ask any questions.

The CHAIR: Does the lead speaker for the opposition wish to make an opening statement?

Ms MICHAELS: I am happy to go straight in.

The CHAIR: Straight into questions, member for Enfield.

Ms MICHAELS: Would you like me to start with planning questions, Attorney?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am happy with whatever you would like.

Ms MICHAELS: I will start with local government because that is the folder in front of me. I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 50, Office of Local Government, Program summary— income, expenses and FTEs. Line 6 has total expenses and the second line has supplies and services. There is a \$1.6 million drop in supplies and services budgeted for this year compared to last year. Can you explain the primary cause for that decrease?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Yes. I am happy to ask Ms Hart to outline that for you. There is an explanation, I think, across the next page of the published material but in any event I will invite her to comment on that.

Ms HART: Thank you, minister, I am happy to address the question. The main variations that you will see in the Office of Local Government budget over the last couple of years are due to allocations of funding that have been provided to us for the provision of municipal services in Aboriginal communities.

You may recall that in last year's budget there was an allocation of \$9.1 million that was allocated to us for works that were necessary in Aboriginal communities to upgrade and renew infrastructure across all communities in South Australia outside the APY lands. That \$9.1 million has been allocated to us over two years, so you will see that the additional money that has been allocated to us for 2021-22 reflects a small part of that, with the expectation that that expenditure will happen by the end of 30 June and the majority of the expenditure over the 2021-22 financial year.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: The only thing I will add to that, if it assists the committee, is that whilst each of these Aboriginal areas provide a regular annual program for the ongoing provision of services—it might be road maintenance or it might be water supply, it depends on the region as to what services they have—there was a significant injection of capital money to come in, which was the municipal services infrastructure program, to repair and renew some of the infrastructure in the Aboriginal communities outside the APY lands. I think overall it was about \$9 million in total and it was spread over the two years, so most of it was last year and there is a portion for this year.

Ms MICHAELS: So if I combine the commonwealth grants with the state funding, has there been an overall increase or decrease?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am just referring to the state funding. That is our state funding. It is not a decrease in amount from \$5 million to \$3½ million, reading that, it was essentially \$9 million over two years, so it is split up into two different portions.

Ms MICHAELS: I take you to the same budget reference. Has the state government budgeted for additional COVID pandemic support to support the mandatory rollout requirements of local government, including supplying masks, for example, for this financial year?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am not aware of any money that has been allocated for the supplying of masks to local government, that is number one. Number two is that there are a number of initiatives that have been—sorry, just to be clear, I thought you would ask about the reform.

Ms MICHAELS: I am getting to that.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am sorry, so this is just in relation to the stimulus funding?

Ms MICHAELS: Any rollouts to support COVID requirements.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: If I can just go to stimulus funding, there are two initiatives: one is the \$105 million that was placed on the table for local government to be able to match from Treasury for infrastructure projects; the second is the advancement of the rollout of the Open Space fund moneys to ensure that those projects could get underway more quickly, and that has been quite instrumental.

I am also advised that councils themselves are well placed to manage their own operational costs in relation to masks. I have not actually seen any submission from anyone, including the LGA, to say that there needed to be some extra support for provision of masks in local council areas.

Ms MICHAELS: I am told masks were provided last financial year to local councils, and I think there was a question of whether additional resources needed to be provided.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am not aware of any. It may be that there was a distribution for the purpose of health inspectors or others who undertake some health role in local government. That includes, as you know, inspection of local restaurants and cafes and all those roles. I do not know whether masks were made available from the health department for those essential inspectors, or something of that nature, but I am not aware of any requests or provision that has been made under this budget for masks for local councils.

Some moneys have been sought in relation to some reforms in the local government legislation that passed the parliament recently. As you know, there were a number of initiatives, including the establishment of a behaviour panel, the Remuneration Tribunal taking over responsibility for CE salaries, and the obligation for councils to, over a period of time, disclose their financial plans for the purpose of assessment by ESCOSA to enable those results to be published.

Some of these may incur some expense in the transition by councils from one to another, and although some councils have raised with me that they might need some support in this regard, I have also pointed out to them that if they want to put a submission in this regard of course I will have a look at it but to understand the significance of councils making a decision to utilise the benefits of any of those three initiatives, for example, all of which have emanated from councils saying, 'This is something we need to have to help us with the cost challenges and the management of our councils to be able to see the benefit.'

If they are going to present to me an argument that there is a need for extra money for certain things, I would certainly want to see what the flip side is. In other words, what the cost is to councils not to employ human resource experts for the purposes of negotiating arrangements for their CE rather than just going off to the tribunal, which is now going to be available to them. Secondly, there is the enormous number of legal costs in dealing with elected member behaviour, which sometimes is expended just in answering complaints between elected members that go off to the Ombudsman's office and/or court.

Obviously, the Ombudsman is kept very busy in relation to local government behaviour matters, some of which will continue to need to go to the Ombudsman, but nevertheless the whole idea is of local government coming to me as minister and my predecessor to say, 'We need to have a different way to be able to manage these disputes so that we can get on with the proper business of our local government and our meetings and the protection of our staff and support in that regard, and also just to be able to generally get on without having these enormous costs.'

I really say to councils, by all means if there is a major expense incurred, I will have a look at it, but you need to do the work to explain in that submission what you are saving, if you are going to do those sorts of assessments. In the meantime, though, we have announced a couple of initiatives where we have put some money in. I think \$1 million was put in for mapping our new website. I am

going to ask Ms Alex Hart to take off her mask and tell the committee the particular initiatives that we have given some money to.

Ms HART: I can advise the committee that we were allocated \$1 million in last year's budget to construct what is known as the Local Government Information Framework. This was an initiative that was recommended by the South Australian Productivity Commission's final report into its inquiries into local government costs and efficiencies. The intent of the framework is to put together a publicly available website that gives communities a better understanding of how their councils raise money, how their councils spend money and their council's financial position and performance through making some key indicators that summarise those matters readily available.

The other purpose of the framework is to provide greater and more detailed information on those things to councils so they can use that as a source of information to progress their own benchmarking work. It will help councils identify where their expenditure on particular functions might be different from other councils or other similar councils and therefore might warrant their commitment of resources to understand why that might be the case and where they might find some efficiencies or savings for their ratepayers.

The publicly available website will be called Councils in Focus. It is nearing the end of its completion. It will shortly be provided to all council chief executive officers to look at before it is made publicly available. The intent of that is to also allow councils to add additional information on the reports that apply to their council so that any ratepayer or member of the public looking at a report about that council's functions can understand the full context in which that information is presented.

We would expect councils would utilise that function, which we call the 'council says' function, to add extra information to what, for example, could be a particular capital expenditure for a particular year to explain why that amount might be looking a little high, or conversely a little low, given the nature of some of those decisions that are made on a council-by-council basis.

Ms MICHAELS: So the million dollars has been spent to create the website you are referring to; is that correct?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I will just check that it has all been spent.

Ms HART: It will be spent on constructing the framework as a whole, so that includes both the public website and the data collation machine that sits behind it to generate the information both for the website and to provide that more detailed level of data to councils to enable them to dig a bit deeper into what is going on at their council and also the other 67 in the state.

Ms MICHAELS: Will any of that funding be available to the councils, as I assume they would need resources to populate this website?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Can I clarify that this is the money for the framework to be established. This is the million dollars. I think it is fair to say that it is a project that has been the subject of some consultation with the councils themselves as to what goes on it and how much and when and all those sorts of things so that it becomes a useful document but also consistent with the ethos of the councils.

Obviously, the LGA has been very instrumental in providing information on what should go on there and the Local Government Grants Commission will provide a lot of the data that it collects to go onto this framework. Each year, the commission collates all that information from the councils and it is the basis on which the financial assistance grants are determined, so you have a reason for the councils to invest, but we are not asking them to do anything more. They are just providing the data that they collect anyway. That goes to the grants commission, which provides this information to go to the framework.

So it is not really a new job that is required. It is just putting it in a format—hence we are building the website to be able to accommodate this—that is going to be useful and not creating extra data that councils are expected to provide.

Ms MICHAELS: So if the councils came to you and said, 'We need one person full time to populate this or half a person to populate this on an ongoing basis to keep this website up to date,' would you provide funding for that?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Obviously, I would have to be convinced that it actually needs to have an extra person to do it because this is data they already collect. This is not new data. We are not creating a framework that is going to be even more difficult and more expensive or more time consuming for councils to provide this.

This is data they already collect. It would be an electronic transfer to the commission. They provide it to the commission. The commission, which is the grants commission, which Mr Green chairs, is populated by two other members—Wendy Campana and Erika Vickery—who comprise the commission. They have a secretariat. I think probably it is Ms Hart here who does most of it. In any event, we are not asking councils through this process to do a whole lot more work. Do you see what I mean? I would have to be convinced, if there was a submission that came to do extra work, that it was actually going to be needed.

Ms MICHAELS: Websites usually are not set and forget sorts of things.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: The website is not going to be maintained by the council. Council provide their data to the commission. The commission will provide the material to the website.

Ms MICHAELS: My question is: is there funding for the maintenance in the budget? For example, 2021-22 seems to have nothing allocated in it.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: You mean by the commission to maintain the position?

Ms MICHAELS: Yes.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Following the launch, Councils in Focus will be maintained by the Office of Local Government, which is Ms Hart sitting next to me here and people who work for her, with the support of the PlanSA team as needed. They already have their own budget.

I just want to reassure the committee that this idea, which has been signed up to by the LGA and other councils, is not one that is designed in any way to produce another onerous role on the part of councils. We are using the government resources together with the commission to be the collator of the data and obviously then maintain it. That is the idea of it.

Ms MICHAELS: Does the website have any interactive aspect to it where people could ask questions and therefore you would need—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Not that I am aware of, but I will just check that. The answer is no, but constituents are encouraged to contact their councils if they have any questions that they want to get further information on about their council.

Ms MICHAELS: So from your perspective, there should be no additional cost to the councils for any compliance in respect to this website.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am not expecting it. In fact, I am expecting that there will be a clear website setting out the activities of the councils, which will be in a way that is easily read by consumers, which in fact will minimise and even reduce, I would hope, the numbers of inquiries to councils, which people who did access this website would have ready answers to. The idea is to make this a project which is useful and helpful to the consumer but also relieves the administrative burden on councils.

As best I understand, this is a process where productivity commissions and all sorts of people come up with these ideas about how you try to improve the efficiency of governance—in this case, the local government fraternity—and this is one that everyone has signed up to and so the government have put the money on the table for it to be activated. As I say, I reassure the committee we are not looking to introduce this as a burdensome obligation to councils, but hopefully it will relieve them of unnecessary inquiries that could easily be sorted out online.

Ms MICHAELS: You have already touched on this, and it is the same budget paper reference: the implementation of the local government review. You have talked about the million dollars. Is there any other funding to assist local governments to implement the some 150 changes that are coming out of the local government review process?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am advised that the LGA has been provided with funding from the Local Government Research and Development Scheme to support its implementation work and

has developed through a program—that is, the LG Equip—to provide councils with training and material to assist their adoption of the reforms. I expect that work to continue intensively over the next six to 12 months, particularly to maximise the opportunity that the 2022 local government periodic elections provide to start a new term of council with many of the reforms in place to guide and support members.

Ms MICHAELS: How much is that funding that you are referring to?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am advised that it is at least \$250,000.

Ms MICHAELS: And there is no additional commitment from the state government beyond that?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Not at this stage. As I have indicated—and I made this very clear in meeting with the LGA—we would be very happy to support the development of legislative reforms that they have asked for and are very keen to develop to help save money, and I think a number of them will. I have also made it very clear that if they want to come with specific requests for technology costs, retraining, or anything else outside this amount of money, they will need to put a presentation to me which outlines both sides of the ledger, and then I will have a look at it. So far, they have not, but the invitation is there.

Ms MICHAELS: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 50 again. The description objective at the top of that page refers to the Office of Local Government providing policy and other advice to the minister. In relation to Local Government Infrastructure Partnership Program grants, did the Office of Local Government provide advice to the minister?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: For which one?

Ms MICHAELS: Local Government Infrastructure Partnership Program grants.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Yes, the \$100 million. To the extent that it was a stimulus initiative, my recollection was that part of the first development of this, which ultimately came from Treasury, was the LGA's request to look at how we might best support local government during COVID. Stimulus spending is commonly an area that is looked at, and this is one that the Treasurer agreed with, and it was important that it be done.

The money was on the table—it was a fifty-fifty contribution, the council too, money out of the fund—and a separate evaluation panel was established. I was not on it, but I understand Ms Hart was on it; she is head of the local government division in the department. They then undertook the assessment of these projects so that they could be selected and administered as quickly as possible. I cannot remember whether I even had to sign off on it, but the Treasurer had to sign off on it, yes.

Ms MICHAELS: So the Office of Local Government did not question the allocation amongst the local councils, with 37 going to Liberal-held seats and only 11 going to councils in Labor-held seats? There were no questions raised about that?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: As I pointed out, Ms Hart sat on the panel. The panel put the recommendations, and the Treasurer had to sign off on them. Certainly, there was a say in relation to it. The fact is that there are many regional councils. As the member might have noticed, outside the seat of Enfield there are a whole lot of regional councils that sit in Liberal seats, so, yes, I suppose there is some expectation.

In the end, everyone who applied got a project, is my recollection of the outcome of that program. I remember at the time encouraging other councils that might have put in multiple projects. Again, if there are other opportunities to put forward money for projects, then they should think about that through the Open Space fund, etc.

Ms MICHAELS: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 50, highlights. Paragraph 2 refers to a reduction in costs for councils and an increase in financial accountability through the local government review. In terms of reduction in costs, can you provide an update of the total cost to councils as a result of the implementation of the 40 per cent solid waste levy on the local government sector?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am not sure that relates to the local government review bill; nevertheless, I am happy to take that on notice. This section relates to what I was just talking about, which relates to the advantage and benefit to councils in a number of the reforms that this parliament recently passed. In my view, the most obvious one in the sense of cost savings is likely to be the extensive legal costs that councils are meeting. Some of the councils spend millions of dollars a year on legal costs, and they are not all in relation to the bad behaviour of councils.

Let me say, for those who get tied up in inquiries, for example, undertaken by the Ombudsman's office, these can be very lengthy and very expensive. For any members who sit in this house—and there are seven of us here present—and who have local councils, look at any of the annual reports of these councils and you will see a very expensive list of legal costs.

The member for Kavel probably would understand the benefit of having good legal advice; however, if it is being spent in a way that councils are unable to avoid because of the behaviour of councillors, then instituting some reform allowing for behavioural panels is just so obvious. Again, I commend the LGA and its members for the work that was done to try to develop those reforms. That is what that paragraph is referring to. In relation to the solid waste levy, can I just have the question again; I might need to take it on notice if it is something we can help you with.

Ms MICHAELS: I think there is some concern that, although we are trying to reduce costs for local councils, the solid waste levy has actually caused an increase. What impact has that had on local councils?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: These matters were raised when the solid waste levy was increased last year. That was a budget initiative last year—the legislation passed this house. Minister Speirs was directly accountable for that, and I think from memory he is giving estimates tomorrow, so you could ask him. The thing he will point out, I am sure, is that the solid waste levy is designed to be a disincentive to fill up the ground with waste.

It is a penalty, essentially, for councils that are largely responsible for the collection and disposal of waste to not stick it in the ground. It is designed to ensure that they do everything they can to recycle what they have when they are collecting rubbish, where possible, and minimise the waste into the landfill. It has been a mechanism imposed for a number of years, certainly in all the time I have been here in the parliament, and it has been one that assists to fund—I think half each year, or a large portion, goes to the EPA, the funding of its inspectors, staff, board, and so on, to do its work, which is basically the environment police, and another large slice for other initiatives that can be applied for back to councils. I think only councils can apply back for that money, but it may be that some other government departments can as well—I cannot recall it all specifically, but they are all matters to address.

There have to be two aspects, and one is the question of the levy. I remember this last year being raised by some councils as being an extra cost for them, but it is a fund that enables access to initiatives to assist councils and others in the waste business to develop initiatives for the benefit of minimising waste, and new things like PFAS that are thrown out in the waste area that need to be looked at.

From a general community viewpoint, in ensuring that we minimise environmental harm and that we deal with contemporary issues relating to waste, this is the sort of expense that all of our electorates demand. They expect us as governments to take the lead in doing both carrot and stick to ensure that environmentally we minimise harm to our environment. In that regard, these are the sorts of balances that have to be considered.

Ms MICHAELS: Can I take you now to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 62, the Outback Communities Authority. The Outback Futures report, which I understand you received in January, Attorney, recommended an enhanced Outback Communities Authority model, better management of public access to the outback and improved regional coordination of government services. Can you inform us how these recommendations are going to be funded and delivered in partnership with the OCA with the reduced funding of approximately \$800,000?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Firstly, the Outback Communities Authority is a statutory body that replaced the old Outback Areas Community Development Trust. The Presiding Member of the OCA, Mr Bill McIntosh, leads a team of representatives from across the state. Frequently, these are

people who either live or operate businesses in the outback. I want to thank them for their ongoing service. They have a projected operating cost of \$3.7 million and that continues. The office for that operates out of Port Augusta and there are also two personnel who are now directly in Leigh Creek.

They have undertaken a review and, in fact, when I came into this role last year, one of the first meetings I attended was with the Outback Communities Authority at William Creek in relation to that very review. It has provided a report and now wants to look at how it implements those recommendations. Whilst there was a bit of a delay from COVID in relation to the outback consultation they did, they provided the report in January this year.

The recommendations included a need for additional services, reduced reliance on volunteers to manage municipal services, a need to undertake more detailed analysis of costs of services, better management of camping in the outback—this obviously related to the age-old question of those who travel around the outback having access to and traversing pastoral leases and some of the dangers that relate to that, whether it is biosecurity or just leaving rubbish—and a more coordinated approach by government agencies with a role to play in the outback. These are all things that have been raised in this report.

In that, they suggested some initiatives as to how they might support funding some of these, so I have asked the committee to continue their consultation in relation to these recommendations. The coordinator, or program manager—I am not sure quite sure what she was actually titled—who was commissioned for the purpose of supporting the review has been contracted, I think, for a further six months to come back with a report to us as the government or to me as the minister by the end of this year as to where they go from here.

It has done valuable work and it is still in the process of being considered. Obviously, now that the recommendations are there we need to have a look at them. There are some interesting things that I have discovered in dealing with this. We have tracks, for example, that traverse pastoral leases in our state and that the public have access to. That is not the same as other states.

When you do that, you open up the chance for grey nomads, as they are colloquially described, for example, to be able to go into lots of different areas in our state. It is wonderful from a tourist perspective and so on but it comes with some air of responsibility that we have to look at, including whether there is going to be any introduction of pests or biosecurity risk, whether there is going to be rubbish left or contamination or even damage, for that matter, in relation to property by people who just decide they will go and camp on someone's property adjacent to a road access.

That is a unique opportunity in South Australia, and how we police it, manage it, etc., and pay for the protections that go with it is one of the challenges we have for the outback. Without diminishing the special privileges we have in South Australia for access, we also need to come up with some solutions. I thank the authority for the work that they have done and are continuing to do. We will hopefully have something by the end of the year, that is the expectation.

Ms MICHAELS: I understand the government has previously made comments about a levy to be imposed on outback properties to fund some of those services that you have just been discussing.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: That is one of the questions that has been raised by the review. It has not been raised by me; it is the review that has undertaken this work about permits and levies—and there are all sorts of other recommendations in this to be considered. That is what they are talking about now regarding the outback. From memory, there are something like 3,000 people who live in this area, and of those there are something like 300 people who are station owners. The other large numbers of people who are serviced by this are people who are resident in towns such as Oodnadatta, Leigh Creek and William Creek, some of whom are employed and a number of whom are not.

I think one of the things that will need to be looked at in considering any of the recommendations is: what is the capacity of the people who live out there and who have really negligible services, to be frank, to contribute to the provision of services? If they do make a contribution, what should they expect to have from that?

It is fair to say, and I do not mean this to be in any way negative towards people who live in an urban environment, that the concept of having running water and hot water when you need it, and to be able to turn on a light when you want light or to operate an electrical piece of equipment, is something that is completely inalienable for many people who live in our outback. They just do not have access to the basic services of clean water and power, to name a couple, let alone good road services on all the outback roads, etc.

What we have to look at as a government, in due course, are the recommendations that the authority puts back to us. I am certainly not about to interfere with the process that they are undertaking, which they think is important to do and I think is important to do. I look forward to receiving their report as to what they recommend.

Ms MICHAELS: Are you anticipating that it is likely there will be some form of levy for certain property owners?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I have no idea yet. It has certainly been canvassed in the review report to date. That will be a matter that will come back to me in the report by the end of the year. I think it is due at the end of the year. Yes, I am getting a nod from Ms Hart; she knows everything.

Ms MICHAELS: I take you to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 50, the Local Government Grants Commission. Given the Treasurer's encouragement of the local sector to 'put more skin in the game'—I am referring to a quote in an *Advertiser* article on 23 April last year—and offer rent relief and rate subsidies to businesses and home owners, can you advise which grants and subsidies are available to local governments to help with the estimated \$338 million cost burden left from this COVID period?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: It is a very big question. I will take it on notice; I think that will be the easiest. To be clear, I am happy to get an answer to the question as to how the state grants have been administered or what has gone out to local government, but that has nothing to do with the commission.

The commission has two roles. It has a role in relation to local government grants. These are national grants, and this year there are three categories for these—I know because I recently saw a memo on them. The commission gives the recommendations on grants. They came to me, and I signed a whole lot of them the other day. They have that role, and it is the job of Mr Green, Ms Campana and Ms Vickery, whom I mentioned before. In addition to that, they have a role in relation to potential changes of boundaries of local governments. I do not mean to diminish that, but basically those are their two jobs.

The administration and distribution of grants and what is available under state COVID relief funds, which I think is what you are asking for, I will have to take that on notice and see if there is anything that has come forward in that regard. The only thing I have had to deal with directly in relation to local government is our Open Space funding, of which more than \$14 million a year now is secured for distribution to those local governments. In fact, I was pleased to be in the City of Salisbury on Sunday planting trees with Mayor Gillian Aldridge and many of her councillors and staff to complete a project of 10,000 not trees but bushes mostly. That has been part of that money.

Ms MICHAELS: I am happy to move on to planning, if that is suitable.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I thank Ms Hart. She is going to disappear and I am now going to ask Mr Burdett to come back and answer all the hard questions.

The CHAIR: I will just remind opposition members that if they have omnibus questions today, they will need to read them in before this session ends.

Ms MICHAELS: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 45, line 9, the FTEs for planning. There are 199.2 currently budgeted for within PLUS. How many of these FTEs are provided to the State Planning Commission?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I think I have some particulars in relation to that. The restructure of the department has been underway and is currently out for consultation with staff. In relation to the new proposed structure for commission assessments, my understanding is that there are 16 FTEs—this is largely to deal with the SCAP—and the Planning and Design Code, 14 FTEs. It is

an area responsible for the code amendment proposals, including on behalf of the State Planning Commission.

I think it is fair to say that there are other people in Planning and Land Use Services (PLUS) who provide information that is important for everyone, including the commission. For example, there are seven FTEs with demographics and forecasting, and they are responsible for undertaking population and demographics, including projection, spatial analysis, performance indicators, scheme and reporting and land supply analysis reports. I think it is fair to say that the work they produce can be available to the commission.

There are also 10 FTEs who work in growth management and that area is responsible for undertaking the regional plans, the environmental and food production areas, the character preservation districts review and the strategic planning initiatives and programs, including all our regional ones. That is the work of the State Planning Commission.

You can see there are some who are dedicated to work that they do. It is proposed that they will have dedicated staff, but they will also have the benefit of administration and also particular areas such as the demographics and forecasting.

Ms MICHAELS: The ones who are dedicated to the State Planning Commission, do they report to the commissioner? How does that work?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: The structure of that is yet to be finalised. Can I say that as a new minister one of the things that I felt needed some uplift was the structure, including the fact that we now had a new State Planning Commission under the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act, and it had a number of roles and we had a new SCAP that does the assessments, and that there ought to be some delineation, I suppose, of people who are available to support them.

This is not something that is a new idea, but I have always maintained the view that if you have an independent body that has a different role from that of the department it ought to have dedicated staff, even if those staff are on a rotated basis for their work. But they ought to be available to the commission and the SCAP, and it seemed to me that that needed to be improved.

Ms MICHAELS: Yes.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I have made this statement publicly, and I think I have made that comment even to the parliament during the course of another area of reform, the multicultural commission, where again I think there needed to be some separation. Our new chief executive, Caroline Mealor, who you met in the committee when she was presented to you, now has the remit overall. Sitting underneath her is Sally Smith, who is the head of the department, and of course Mr Burdett is the acting head of this division at the moment. That work is being undertaken, and the whole restructure is currently being developed and has been out for discussion with the staff and I hope will be implemented.

To give you an idea of the flavour of where it is going, I hope that has made it a bit clearer that there is some separate area of responsibility. It is fair to say that of the total actual full-time equivalents I think there were from memory 71 under the current structure, but I think only 58 are filled. There were 12 or 13 that have not actually been filled, and it is proposed to move to 62 positions, so in fact there will be slightly more, once the others are filled, than currently actually exist with people whose roles have not been filled now.

I just ask the committee to be cognisant of the fact that there has been a very significant body of work just completed by the commission and a lot of people in this department—that is, the large body of work that needed to be done to complete the ePlanning system and the new planning, development and infrastructure code. That work was massive, that last tranche, completing it and getting it operational by 19 March. It is going through some amendments to tidy up when you introduce a whole new system like that.

It is now time for the department to re-identify what its priorities are and I think hopefully respect the separation of the commission and its role, which it is now currently already undertaking in relation to the environment and food production area reform, character preservations, etc., that

are being looked at—that is a whole body of work that is underway—and also to make sure that whatever code amendments need to be looked at are now being done under the new system.

For the benefit of the committee, and I had a look at this recently, for a code amendment, which replaces the old DPA under the Development Act, the code amendment can be initiated. I think I have to approve all of these, but they can be initiated by state agencies, by a council, by a joint planning board, by infrastructure providers or by any person who is seeking to alter the plan, which is usually a developer. I am paraphrasing that, but that is the gist of it.

At the moment, there are 29 code amendments that have been initiated. There are 16 that have been initiated but have not gone to the next stage, and of those the majority are by a private developer. Some have been by me or councils or the Planning Commission themselves. There is also a further one code amendment that has been consulted upon, and that is one at Plympton. There are nine, all of which have been presented by councils, which have been consulted on and concluded and are just waiting a final decision. Three have already been finalised: they are at Aldinga, Robe and Coffin Bay.

So it has been quite an active area of work to be done. I think that industry and councils which are very significant players in the planning world, together with the commission itself, are all having different roles in relation to these code amendments. It is a huge amount of work to be done. But I just want to assure the committee that it is underway.

Ms MICHAELS: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 45, line 9, which is FTEs again. There have been reports in the media about allegations of poor workplace culture within PLUS, allegations of toxic, hostile work environments. Do you believe that there is a workplace culture issue within PLUS at the moment?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I was concerned to read that headline, but I am satisfied that, on the information I have been provided, the complaint of an individual party that resulted in that was perhaps not reflective of the circumstances compared to the headline. Nevertheless, PLUS has been the subject of the survey, which I have referred to in other portfolios today, and I think, like most of them, there is some room for improvement in some areas.

I have found the matters in relation to providing good and timely advice and support generally as a department and the contribution up to my office and to me have been very good. But there is always room for improvement. I think it is a matter where we, as a government, need to continue to strive to support those in our workplaces wherever concerns are raised, not only by a survey but obviously where individual concerns are raised and that, if there is a legal issue, it be properly followed through.

I am going to ask Mr Burdett to make a comment in relation to the survey generally because that is a matter that has also been the subject of some comment.

Mr BURDETT: The results of the 'I say' survey have been recently published. Across the agency, the outcome was really quite outstanding. Within the planning division, there were mixed results. We had some very outstanding results and we had some areas where there is clearly room for improvement. If we go back to the previous survey, we had similar mixed results and that gave us a targeted area of places where we put in particular pieces of work to try to improve those.

We are currently working with those previous results and the current results to look at laying out a plan for future improvement in areas that we can target. I think there are some specific areas where we have seen that we can do better. It is particularly difficult in some areas where we have just come off a major project and we are in the middle of the restructure while we are doing that survey. I believe that has resulted in some of the negative outcomes of it and that they are, if you like, the timing because of those two matters.

Ms MICHAELS: The matter that I think the Attorney was referring to and the one that certainly raised concerns for me was the allegations made by Deniz Kilic. Is he still employed within planning?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I will take that on notice. I have certainly had a briefing in relation to a particular matter but I would not make a public statement in relation to any particular employee. Whether that is the name of the person or not, I do not know. I cannot recall that detail. I think, from

memory, it is an issue that has been resolved in relation to a complaint that was raised. I will just check that. No, it is still under investigation, so I will not make any comment. But if there is a capacity for me to provide any other update on that to the committee, I am happy to do that, but I will just have to check whether that is able to be done.

Ms MICHAELS: Are you able to advise how many complaints have been made in relation to human resource issues within planning in the last financial year?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am not, but I am happy to take that on notice. This last one, which was in the media, was the only one that I think has been brought to my attention. That does not mean there have not been other complaints or other concerns raised, but I will take that on notice.

Ms MICHAELS: Can you advise how many—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Can I just say, there is a human resource person who has certainly provided to me a direct briefing in relation to the matter that was in question. There are people obviously in the government sector who are vested with the responsibility to manage these things and of course, where appropriate, to support employees during any legal process.

Ms MICHAELS: Is the public sector commissioner involved in that investigation?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I do not think so, no.

Ms MICHAELS: Can you also advise how many staff have left planning in the last financial year and whether there have been any redundancies in the last financial year?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am happy to take that on notice. I just make the point that one of the things that becomes very clear when one gets into government is that the transition of a number of employees is sometimes not to leave the public sector altogether; it is to take up a position of opportunity in another arm of government and, obviously, we wish them well. In fact, sometimes I lose really good people to another department and I have to think of who I am going to snaffle from someone else.

In short, there are a number of reasons why people transfer but, to be frank, that is the same as the private sector. It is an area I worked in for a long time, and the concept of having somebody work for you for 25 years is just simply gone. Mr Burdett, I am sure, is an exception because he is such a good person, but the transience of employment is just another feature of the 21st century.

In addition to that, because the reform project is now largely completed in relation to the planning area, going from the Development Act to the PDI Act, there are a massive number of people who are brought on to be involved in that transition. There are also a large number of people—the technos, in relation to the ePlanning platform and portal development—who have really come and gone just in the time that I have been responsible in this role.

Similarly, I have just dealt with the Courts Administration Authority this afternoon, and they have had a massive ECMS program which is coming to its conclusion, with the last tranche having gone from probate to civil and now to criminal. There will be a large number of people who have undertaken the work in that regard, concluded it and they will move on to other public or private enterprise, no doubt, to provide the next tranche. That is just symptomatic of a modern world, I think, and something we have to accept. That does not mean in any way I am going to let Mr Burdett go; I am not going to let him go.

The CHAIR: Attorney, I take it 'technos' is a technical term?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I am the last person to ask that question. The technical experts, if I can put it that way—whether they are in cybersecurity, whether they build the platforms for these things or whether they provide maintenance and advice—provide a whole lot of expertise that goes into those things.

The CHAIR: I was being somewhat facetious, Attorney.

Ms MICHAELS: I take you to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 44, the fifth bullet point in the highlights:

Distributed \$22.3 million from the Planning and Development Fund to 27 projects as part of the Open Space and Places for People 2020-21 grant round.

Do you still think it was appropriate to utilise funds from the Planning and Development Fund for the ePlanning and planning code implementation?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: This was something that was extended from Minister Rau's time, continued through Minister Knoll and I have had to clean up and finish it. There would be nothing new in that. I think some funding went to the ePlanning project. I have had legal advice on that, and that is completely lawful. I have made sure, though, that whatever funds are available are in relation to distribution for projects. We now have a panel, which I think is chaired by my head of office for design.

In the time I have been in this job, there has been a minimum of \$14 million each year to make sure that money is available for projects. Furthermore, I have asked that they be brought forward in assessment. So on 1 July this year the letters went out to every council saying, 'Now is the time to put this in.' I think it concludes at the end of this month, at the end of August—yes, I have nodding from the chair of that panel. They assess it and letters will go out to the councils as to what has been accepted.

To me, it was not acceptable that we had letters and approvals going out in the 11th month of the financial year to approve someone's funding. It just seemed to me ridiculous. I can tell you that I have sat on other boards and things before I came into this place, in home and community care, for example. These are areas of distribution of public money in which, frankly, there is no excuse, I do not think, for anyone to be distributing the money in each financial year 11 months into the financial year. I just think it is unacceptable.

So it is a practice which, early on, I looked at. I have asked the department to come up with a process by which this can be done much more quickly and efficiently and with the support of the new panel, actually to be administered in a way that we can get that money out to the councils—because it is only councils that can apply for this money—so that they can get on with those projects. I recently went to Murray Bridge for the member's announcement there. Yesterday, I was in Salisbury. I get the pleasure now of actually going to the councils and seeing what they have done with it and it is fantastic.

I do not in any way apologise for putting the pressure on that process improving. I think that it has been necessary. The other aspect of this, which I am really pleased about, is that it is just a reminder to everyone here in the chamber that this money does not have to be for a project to develop a new streetscape or a new planned tree planting or anything. It can be for the acquisition of property and I have urged councils to look at whether there is a little parcel of land in their own area that they might like to acquire for the purpose of either adding it on to some other project or developing it.

It has been surprising that some mayors have said to me that they were not even aware that that was an area of opportunity they might have. This is money that is paid by developers into funds where they are basically using the footprint for their development of the land that they are developing. They have to pay a price, I suppose, for not having the open space for the people who are going to occupy those premises. It may be that some are high-rises, or whatever.

A lot of money goes into this fund. We need to make sure that it gets back out to councils on council application, they decide what is important to them, if it is a priority for them in open space, and they get a chance to put their submission in, and we now have a panel to make that assessment. I am very pleased with the department's achievement in that regard. It predated Mr Burdett, so he does not get any credit for it.

Ms MICHAELS: Attorney, I take you to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 44, which has a description/objective that deals with preparation of new planning instruments. There has been a bit in the media lately about the Mount Compass Golf Course, and I understand that has been before the State Planning Commission, the ERDC and before you. Have you been advocating for that code amendment on behalf of the golf course owner?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Certainly not; that is the first thing. Secondly, the code amendment, if I can try to describe it in as simple a way as possible—most members would be

familiar with Mount Compass. It is a small country town. It is a beautiful little town in originally a dairy district on the Fleurieu Peninsula. It has a golf course which traverses adjacent to the town.

When the State Planning Commission wrote to me on 4 June, they indicated that they agreed to support that the Mount Compass Golf Course estate code amendment be undertaken by the chief executive, which would consider whether the golf course estate zone in the code was a suitable zone to apply to the land. The Environment, Resources and Development Committee of the parliament provided scrutiny over all amendments to the code and considered the matter. In forming its view, it heard evidence from the Alexandrina Council and presented a recommendation that the Mount Compass Golf Course property be zoned golf course estate.

I have considered the ERDC recommendation and advise that I do not propose to make this change, noting instead that the commission has written to me recommending that a separate rezoning process be initiated by the chief executive of the department, which I support. There is more process relating to that but, in short, it will enable this process now to be undertaken and ensure that there is consultation on it.

It is fair to say, as I understand it, that when we moved from the Development Act to the PDI Act there was certainly a view held by some that the transfer of like to like should have actually transferred this project or this area to golf course estate, but it did not. Concerns were raised about that which were inconsistent with the general principle that we would transfer like for like. These other processes have been looked at. I think the fairest in the end is to ensure that this process be undertaken, as I have indicated, and it will facilitate the consultation with the local people about this matter and hopefully come to a resolution that considers all the matters in question.

Arguably, it should have been dealt with better in the first place. That would be my assessment, but that did not happen, so I am proposing this course of action to try to ensure that we give everyone a say and that we properly recognise what needs to be done. There are golf course estate zones that apply to a number of different golf courses around the state. I have a few of them here: Berri Barmera, Port Hughes, Waikerie, Robe, Links Lady Bay, Wirrina Cove and McCracken in Victor Harbor.

I do not know the full detail, but apparently it is a model that enables you to have a golf course but allows for some residences to be within the precinct. As I said, it is a model across the state and we have a number of these. It is not a unique model, but somewhere along the line I think the process was not as good as it should have been.

Ms MICHAELS: With that model in mind, do you have any idea of how many residential homes will be built around the golf course if it does get rezoned as golf course estate?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I have no idea. I think in that case there are already some residences around the golf course. I was trying to think the other day of the name of the farming family who actually donated some of that land initially to have a golf course there, but I am sure they are long since dead. I am pretty sure in material I have read in relation to the Mount Compass facility that there are already some residences that have been built around it, but if they do propose to develop a new proposal for more housing then they have to present a concept plan and it has to go through an approval process in itself.

Just like any other development, there are lots of people who put ideas up and sometimes they are brilliant ideas and sometimes they are hopeless. The fact is that that is why we have a process of planning and we have an approval process that involves consultation, just like these concept plans. I saw some media the other day in relation to the Scotty's Motel, which frankly, as everyone agrees, is a downgraded facility which needs to be upgraded. There is no question about that.

But we have a process to go through and if somebody wants to put in an idea about how they redevelop that site and any other area around it, and they want to put forward a code amendment, then that is a process and they have to comply with it, and people have to have a say, and that is precisely what is happening. That is what our new Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act requires, which I hasten to remind the committee was legislation passed back in 2016 and effective from 2017.

Ms MICHAELS: You have just mentioned Scotty's Corner, and you have approved, I understand, the proposal to amend the code—the code amendment for that corner—which will increase the height to seven storeys at that location.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Just to be clear about what I have approved as minister: for anyone to initiate a code amendment, which is a process, I have to give approval for that to occur. I think I just indicated to you that there are 16 code amendments out at the moment which are in that initiation process, and one of them is the matter that you have referred to. There are others. As I say, in that instance there are 15 others which are all in a similar sort of state. Largely that relies on the next stage where it goes out for consultation. Of those, as I think I said to you, the majority—about 10 of them—are by private developers, and they all have to go through the process.

Basically, this is the process to consider a change of the rules that apply for what can be done within an area. It does not apply to the particular project. That is SCAP or the commission or myself or various other approving authorities.

Ms MICHAELS: And through that process there will be opportunities for the council and local residents to give their feedback?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Absolutely, and that has been made very clear, I think, much to the embarrassment of some of those who raised it late last week. Nevertheless, I think the important thing is that this is a new law which is providing a new process of obligation, consultation and transparency. These applications, as they are initiated as such, go up on a website. I urge anyone who has any support for or opposition to any of these projects to make sure they have a say. The local councils get notice of this and they have an opportunity to put in their say.

I think I saw some media on Scotty's Corner where one of the councillors was expressing her view about what she thought was acceptable and what was not, but these are all matters in a process where people can have a say, and I certainly urge them to do so. This is their amenity around, in this case, a residential area. As the member may be aware, there is a whole corridor along Main North Road where there are a large number of businesses and commercial enterprises along that stretch. Back towards the city, of course, it is car yard city all the way down.

Ms MICHAELS: It is very empty at the moment.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: These are the sorts of things that when they come up for redevelopment I welcome somebody coming along with an investment objective and proposals but they do not just get a tick. They have to go through a process, and I urge people who live around them or people who might be in competition with them, or people who are concerned about the loss of amenity—whatever it is—to step up and make their contribution known.

Ms MICHAELS: I take you to the same budget reference, Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 44, the description/objective in preparing new planning instruments. Kangaroo Island Plantation Timbers has a proposal to build a wharf on Kangaroo Island at Smith Bay. Can you advise what the current status of that application is? Is it with you for decision, or is it with the State Planning Commission at the moment?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: In addition to the material that I have already provided to the parliament, I will just refer the member to my ministerial statement on this matter. To set out the history of the development of this matter, it is a major project application that was initiated by my predecessor, Minister Rau, in 2017. Late last year, there was a change of application by the proponent, the details and dates of which have been presented in the ministerial statement to the parliament.

As the member may be aware, the commission then, after public consultation earlier this year, have responsibility to prepare their assessment report. A few weeks ago, I understand, the commission travelled to Kangaroo Island to inspect the site, and at the end of last week they provided me with an assessment report to note. I am not sure whether they are recommendations yet—it is a little unclear—but I propose to meet with the commission tomorrow to ascertain what they actually mean by this material; it seems to be a new process. I have dealt with a number of these applications, and this one seems to introduce a new process, so I have asked to speak to the commission to find out what exactly they are suggesting I do here. It seems to be going into a different process.

In any event, I have just received an assessment report from them. I think it came in on Thursday afternoon. I have had a good read of that, and hopefully I will be able to get some clarification of what I am supposed to do next. It does not ask me to approve anything. It just asks me to note the assessment report and to consider some other matters, so I need to clarify what that is. I thought it was coming to me as a final process, but anyway that is a matter I will deal with tomorrow.

Ms MICHAELS: So it could still be some time away for a decision to be made?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Maybe. It may finish tomorrow. I do not know. I am just making the point that all I have received so far is the assessment report and some advice that seems to be a little different from the other applications I have had, so I have asked to find out what I am supposed to do next. As soon as I have that advice, I will move on.

Ms MICHAELS: This is possibly my last question before I move to omnibus. There seems to be—

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: I just mention, though, I think I read a transcript this morning sometime of the local member complaining about not getting an answer back from me in relation to this. I suggest he checks his mail, because I sent him back a letter on 15 July.

Ms MICHAELS: I will let him know, thank you. There seems to be some concern about Smith Bay as the location for the port.

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Sorry?

Ms MICHAELS: There seems to be some concern about Smith Bay being the best location for the port, prosecuted by the mayor, Mr Pengilly, over on Kangaroo Island. Has the government ever commissioned its own assessment of a best location for that port to export timber from Kangaroo Island?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: The government is not involved in the process. The major process is one where a certain process has to occur and the assessment report is prepared by the commission.

Ms MICHAELS: But separately from that, has there ever been a process undertaken by government to look at where an ideal port would be to get timber off Kangaroo Island?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Not by government. The assessing party has to look at a number of things. That is clearly one of the numbers of reports that they look at, but the commission, at this point, has given me an assessment report as the ultimate adjudicator on these things for any major project. I have only done a few of them, but I have done enough to be able to know what the usual process is.

Those assessment reports have, in the experience I have had—and I have done two other ports, one at Port Augusta and one on the West Coast—set out a number of things: environmental issues, economic factors, existing industry, effects on those things, noise, roads, infrastructure obligations, all the things that come with these major projects, and they are presented. With that is an assessment, really a summary, of the areas of pro and against, people who have put submissions in—not every one; it is not detailed. There are schedules of them; you can go back and look at all those.

Basically, they look at all those matters, and certainly in the other two ports that I have looked at, which have been approved, there has been consideration of other sites as one of the factors that is taken into account. In any event, in this instance I will get some guidance from the commission tomorrow as to what I can do next, because it is not clear in the material I have. I have their assessment report. It is the second one because the proponents changed the one we presented last year in September 2020. They put in a new project and that is what has been processed under my time.

Ms MICHAELS: I will jump to the omnibus questions:

1. For each department and agency reporting to the minister:

- What is the actual FTE count at 30 June 2021 and the projected actual FTE count for each year of the forward estimates;
 - What is the total employment cost for each year of the forward estimates;
 - What is the notional FTE job reduction target that has been agreed with Treasury for each year of the forward estimates;
 - Does the agency or department expect to meet the target in each year of the forward estimates; and
 - How many TVSPs are estimated to be required to meet FTE reductions over the forward estimates?
2. For each department and agency reporting to the minister:
- How much is budgeted to be spent on goods and services for 2021-22, and for each of the years of the forward estimates period;
 - The top 10 providers of goods and services by value to each agency reporting to the minister for 2020-21;
 - A description of the goods and/or services provided by each of these top 10 providers, and the cost to the agency for these goods and/or services; and
 - The value of the goods and services that was supplied to the agency by South Australian suppliers?
3. Between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021, will the minister list the job title and total employment cost of each position with a total estimated cost of \$100,000 or more which has (1) been abolished and (2) which has been created?
4. Will the minister provide a detailed breakdown of expenditure on consultants and contractors above \$10,000 between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021 for all departments and agencies reporting to the minister, listing:
- the name of the consultant, contractor or service supplier;
 - cost;
 - work undertaken;
 - reason for engaging the contractor; and
 - method of appointment?
5. For each department and agency for which the minister has responsibility:
- How many FTEs were employed to provide communication and promotion activities in 2020-21 and what was their employment expense;
 - How many FTEs are budgeted to provide communication and promotion activities in 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, 2024-25 and what is their estimated employment expense;
 - The total cost of government-paid advertising, including campaigns, across all mediums in 2020-21 and budgeted cost for 2021-22?
6. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, please provide a full itemised breakdown of attraction and retention allowances as well as non-salary benefits paid to public servants and contractors between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021.
7. What is the title and total employment cost of each individual staff member in the minister's office as at 30 June 2021, including all departmental employees seconded to ministerial offices?

8. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, could you detail:
- How much was spent on targeted voluntary separation packages in 2020-21;
 - What department funded these TVSPs;
 - What number of TVSPs were funded;
 - What is the budget for targeted voluntary separation packages for financial years included in the forward estimates (by year), and how are these packages funded; and
 - What is the breakdown per agency/branch of targeted voluntary separation packages for financial years included in the forward estimates (by year) by FTEs?

9. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, how many executive terminations have occurred since 1 July 2020 and what is the value of executive termination payments made?

10. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, what new executive appointments have been made since 1 July 2020, what is the annual salary and total employment cost for each position?

11. In the 2020-21 financial year, for all departments and agencies reporting to the minister, what underspending on operating programs (1) was and (2) was not approved by cabinet for carryover expenditure in 2021-22?

12. In the 2020-21 financial year, for all departments and agencies reporting to the minister, what underspending on investing or capital projects or programs (1) was and (2) was not approved by cabinet for carryover expenditure in 2021-22? How was much sought and how much was approved?

13. For each grant program or fund the minister is responsible for please provide the following information for 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years:

- Name of the program or fund;
- The purpose of the program or fund;
- Balance of the grant program or fund;
- Budgeted (or actual) expenditure from the program or fund;
- Budgeted (or actual) payments into the program or fund;
- Carryovers into or from the program or fund; and
- Details, including the value and beneficiary, of any commitments already made to be funded from the program or fund.

14. For the period of 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, provide a breakdown of all grants paid by the department/agency that report to the minister, including when the payment was made to the recipient and when the grant agreement was signed by both parties.

15. For each year of the forward estimates, please provide the name and budgeted expenditure across the 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years for each individual investing expenditure project administered by or on behalf of all departments and agencies reporting to the minister.

16. For each year of the forward estimates, please provide the name and budget for each individual program administered by or on behalf of all departments and agencies reporting to the minister.

17. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, what is the total cost of machinery of government changes since 1 July 2020 and please provide a breakdown of those costs?

18. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, what new sections of your department or agency have been established since 1 July 2020 and what is their purpose?

19. For each department and agency reporting to the minister:

- What savings targets have been set for each year of the forward estimates;
- What measures are you implementing to meet your savings target; and
- What is the estimated FTE impact of these measures?

The Hon. V.A. CHAPMAN: Can I indicate that I will take those on notice, you will be pleased to know, rather than actually sit here for the next two hours and answer them all. I indicate that there will be a correction provided as well in relation to an assertion of a 25 per cent figure in relation to the survey that was presented in one of the questions I think by the member for Kaurua. In any event, one of the committee members raised it. I am advised that that is incorrect, but we will provide that information to the committee, together with the other material, to correct the record in relation to that.

Mr Chairman, thank you so much for your continued service as our Chair. It has certainly been valued by me, as one of those who answers the questions. We sit diligently to listen to you arbitrate these matters. I thank you again for your service to the committee.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Attorney, and thank you to your advisers through the afternoon. Thank you to committee members. There being no further questions, I declare the examination of the proposed payments for the Attorney-General's Department and the Administered Items for the Attorney-General's Department complete.

At 18:36 the committee adjourned to Tuesday 3 August 2021 at 09:00.