

CORRECTED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2002–03 budget estimates

Melbourne – 27 June 2002

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Ms B. Pike, Minister for Community Services;

Ms P. Faulkner, Secretary;

Mr J. Davidson, Executive Director, Policy and Strategic Projects;

Mr L. Wallace, Executive Director, Financial and Corporate Services;

Mr A. Rogers, Executive Director, Disability Services;

Ms P. White, Executive Director, Community Care;

Ms B. Whitmore-Seidel, Manager, Budget and Program Support, Community Care, Department of Human Services.

The CHAIRMAN — Before going to questions on community services, I thank the previous attendees and welcome Ms Pam White, executive director, community care; Mr Arthur Rogers, executive director, disability services; and Mr Jim Davidson, executive director, policy and strategic projects.

Minister, would you care to make a presentation on the community services portfolio before questions?

Ms PIKE — Thank you very much, Chair. I will make this presentation in two parts. The community services portfolio includes community care as well as disability services. I turn to community care from the outset.

Overheads shown.

Ms PIKE — The program components are very diverse and broad. They range from statutory services for children at risk of harm and young offenders to the more universal services such as maternal and child health and preschools. There are also a number of services that are targeted at more vulnerable families and individuals, such as family support, problem gambling and financial counselling services. The community care area also manages the concessions program, which provides subsidies for essential services to make them more affordable for older and poorer Victorians. So it is a program of very high complexity.

The community care budget is continuing to grow, and we have been working towards restoring the viability of the community services sector. There have been significant rises since we came to office. The 2002–03 community care budget is 28 per cent higher than that available four years ago and is delivering an overall increase of 8.2 per cent next year.

We are also working right across a range of other government programs in terms of developing and implementing a whole-of-government strategy. We are working in the Growing Victoria Together area; in Best Start, which is human services and education; and on the indigenous family violence strategy. We are working with justice on victims of crime; implementing key components of the women's safety strategy; and working with my other portfolio of housing as part of the neighbourhood renewal program, which we spoke about extensively last time. We know that this kind of whole-of-government approach is absolutely essential.

You will also know that we can only fulfil our working partnership with community organisations. We have many partnerships and funding arrangements with community organisations, and this is necessary to produce better outcomes for families. The focus is on building the capacity of families and individuals and strengthening communities, because we know that healthy communities help families to be healthy and grow and develop.

We have some key challenges. We know that the needs and issues that are faced by our clients are becoming more complex. There is a growth in demand for our services. Notifications to child protection have risen by 17 per cent in five years. They have been rising steadily, as you know, since the introduction of mandatory reporting, and they are rising more steeply in rural regions. That is a key challenge for us.

Renotifications make up 61 per cent of notifications for child protection, so that is a critical challenge for us. We know that there is a far higher rate of participation by indigenous children and young people in the system, and that is not appropriate. The challenge in juvenile justice is that there has been an increase in the number of serious offenders in custody, from 15 per cent to 43 per cent in Malmsbury over the last five years, and the average length of sentence has increased by 61 per cent.

We have got those challenges at the critical end of the service system, but we know that good public policy involves shifting the balance from the secondary and tertiary sectors to their primary and early intervention strategies, which will help people to help themselves and their community.

The community care budget is a two-pronged approach to supporting families and children. The first component is maintaining the balance between the investment in the universal and early years services and increasing our statutory obligations. We know that for every dollar invested in services in the early years we can save approximately \$7 in the later years of life, so the Best Start strategy is a very important project to increase and strengthen the capacity of early years services in education and human services to meet the needs of children and their parents.

In this first section of the strengthening early years service we are also enhancing preschool initiatives following the Kirby* review, and we are particularly improving access for vulnerable children and easing the pressure on committees of management.

In protecting and supporting our most vulnerable families and children we will be trialling prevention and diversion strategies in child protection as well as introducing a very creative and innovative new therapeutic service targeting those kids who have been seriously abused in order to reduce the development of challenging behaviours in the later years.

The next slide spells out the components of the Best Start program. I will not talk about this too extensively, other than to say that it is a \$7.6 million initiative over three years. It is designed to resource community partnerships so we can enhance the education, development and wellbeing of children from 0 years to 8 years. Basic things like breastfeeding, working with families and connecting them to support services, increasing literacy rates and things like that are all part of it.

The Kirby report gave us some very strong foundations for policy development for the preschool enhancement program. The commitment of \$23.3 million to this area enhances the quality of preschool service delivery and development. It develops new flexible and innovative ways to assist committees of management and increases the participation of children from vulnerable groups, particularly disabled children. That is a key important component of that initiative.

In child protection and family support \$15 million in recurrent funding has been provided this year. That is additional money, or new money. That will fund eight new innovation projects to support vulnerable families. This is around those families that we are identifying in those 61 per cent renotification statistics. We want to work intensively with those families in an integration between child protection and family support so we can try and identify the renotification factors and work with them more intensively. Two of those are indigenous family programs. As you can see, we are providing new protection workers, new kinship and permanent care places, and specific work such as \$600 000 for our new protocols with the Aboriginal community so we can deal more appropriately with Aboriginal children who are notified. There is also some indexation for caregiver payments, and we are continuing to replace our residential care facilities. We have more projects and development in the pipeline.

Child protection has been identified as one of the five flagship projects for the whole of the Department of Human Services. We are eagerly awaiting the outcome of that work so we can continue to plan for a more effective and efficient system. Part of that is having a look at the conceptual base that underpins our Children and Young Persons Act and whether it is helpful in dealing with this growing issue in our community. On top of that, we are also reviewing our out-of-home care — that is, foster care and kinship care — placement and support, including caregiver payments and supports. That is a very important part of our ongoing strategy in this financial year. We are also working on a number of other fundamental support areas: child and family wellbeing, maternal and child health, problem gambling, the indigenous family violence strategy, and victims of crime.

You will see and know that demand for juvenile justice has been higher than we expected. That has been sustained as a result of court sentencing practices. The new facility we have announced, the \$14.85 million facility at Parkville, will dramatically improve physical standards. The diversionary initiatives which were introduced previously are still part of the base of the juvenile justice budget and ongoing funding. They have decreased the number of receptions into custody, so they have been very effective. As I just said, they have decreased the number of receptions into custody, but what has offset that and necessitated our rebuilding of Turana has been a 61 per cent increase in the average sentence length. This is quite different from the previous trend, where receptions were increasing by 17 per cent. We have slowed that reception area — in fact we have decreased it — but the 61 per cent increase in sentencing length has made the need for custodial beds more apparent.

Another success under the diversion strategy is a 32 per cent increase in the number of young people paroled with no drop in successful parole completions. Getting kids onto parole and reintegrating them into the community with all the supports that are necessary is absolutely fundamental. Despite the increased demand for custodial services, we in Victoria still have something that we can be very proud of. There is a long history to this, and we should acknowledge that, but we have the lowest incarceration rate for juveniles in Australia, with 12.8 per 100 000 compared to Queensland, the next lowest, with 20.5.

In terms of improving the clarity of the budget, you will know that following some recommendations from this committee a number of new indicators have been added this year in child protection and placement, juvenile justice and family and community support. We will continue to review our output structures over the coming year, and I expect that we will be dividing some of our output structures into a larger number to improve the transparency of the budget and our programs. There has been a high level of performance over the past year, with performance targets being met on all but two occasions.

In the case of protection interventions closed within 90 days, performance has improved on last year, but I have to say that it still falls short of the target because of the increased complexity of the families and young people using this service. In the case of juvenile justice clients participating in prerelease programs, which is another indicator, we believe that that indicator is poorly designed. It reflects on the whole of the juvenile justice population when the whole of the population is not eligible for prerelease programs. It is not a particularly good indicator, and we will be working on that in the future.

I will now turn quickly to disability services, the other major component of the community services portfolio. I want to give you an overview of the budget and the sector, the past initiatives, the key challenges, the priorities and some of the issues and then quickly have a look at the budget for this year.

You will note that the graph on the next slide shows that between 1999–2000 and 2002–03 the budget has shown an overall increase. In 2000–01 it was \$96.6 million, it was \$42.2 million the following year and it is \$55.5 million this year — an increase of 34 per cent over the period of this government. In a small way we have to acknowledge that some of this increase is attributable to commonwealth growth funding: there was a special injection of funding between 2000 and 2002 as part of the commonwealth–state disability agreement. We are obviously struggling for that in the next one which we are negotiating at the moment. However, I note that it is a mark of our successful negotiating that our share has increased.

This is how the budget is allocated. You can see that by far the greatest amount of funding is allocated to shared support accommodation — people living in community residential units (CRUs) and other residential settings — with 43.3 per cent of the budget relating to that. That is provided by the government and non-government sectors. The next biggest area is community participation. That includes day programs, the Futures for Young Adults program and community-based support. At around \$60 million it is about 8 per cent of the budget. We are moving gradually to shift our support towards more community and home-based support, reflecting the needs and aspirations of carers and people with disabilities.

The next slide is a quick snapshot of the demographics we can draw from the ABS figures to know that we have a big challenge. We have a number of people in Victoria who need very specialist and high levels of support. Particularly note the 270 000 people with a severe or profound disability. You will also notice, of course, that there are some very strong issues for disability services: people with disabilities are often marginalised in their access to general support services, their lower labour participation rates, their higher unemployment rates, and their lower attainment of year 12.

In the next slide we have a breakdown of the types, but we will move on.

The next slide is important because you will note that there is an increase in age groups with severe and profound disability. The 45-plus age group is growing and will increase. We know that that is partly because of the better health status for people with disabilities, with improved technology, improved medical resources, improved medications and all those things that enhance people's quality of life and their health status. It does present a challenge for us, and I might say it also presents a challenge for the commonwealth, with its responsibility to fund aged care services. The complexity of the needs a disabled people brings into the ageing period is a challenge for all of us.

We have a very good record. Between 1999 and 2002 we have implemented a number of initiatives to address demand issues. On the Home First program, which is about intensive home support, we have great feedback, and there is an indicator to show that people find it a very positive service. We are focusing on quality, including work force development, and of course long-term planning through the state disability plan.

As in every portfolio there are some key challenges. We know that demand is increasing and that the age group I identified requires some very strategic responses and resources. We know that people with disabilities may have a greater need for access to general support systems but have a greater degree of difficulty actually accessing those support systems. So we do need to increase access to the generic service system which is available for the whole population — things like health and education. There are a number of initiatives that come together for that.

We know that the work force is a key issue. We need to recruit more people — this is an Australia-wide issue; it is not just here for Victoria. We need to retain people, and we need to develop the skills and enhance the capacity of our staff. That is a key challenge for all of us in the disability sector particularly but the health sector more broadly. Of course there is our ongoing work to really enhance the capacity of the community to accept, include and value people with a disability. Also we know that services always need to be improved. We are very cognisant of the

Auditor-General's report. Our investment to date of course is working hard to address that, but there is always more to be done.

Our key priorities are the development of a demand management strategy, which we are working on with the support of Treasury and other central agencies this year. It is a whole-of-department approach. We are finalising and implementing the 10-year state plan. We are improving our work force development. Of course finally you will see the Kew Residential Services redevelopment, a major initiative of this government over the next six or seven years.

I do want to talk briefly about the commonwealth–state disability agreement. It is very topical, because I am heading off tomorrow to a community and disability services meeting with the commonwealth. We are at a very critical stage. The states acknowledge that the commonwealth's offer is absolutely unsatisfactory. Certainly it is not going to assist us enormously in terms of the demand management challenge that we have. They are offering little indexation and no growth. Not only that, they are trying to tie any additional unmet needs funding that they are offering to the passage of the disability pension legislation in the Senate, which is incredible. So it is a robbing-Peter-to-pay-Paul-type of situation. We are very concerned about that.

That pension change alone will affect 30 000 Victorians with disabilities. They will be transferred to New Start, with immediate loss of income, immediate loss of security and more pressure on the disability support system. As housing minister, of course, I know that will have a direct impact on people, either in staying in public housing, where they may have moved because they have a slightly bigger pension, or in jumping onto our waiting list. So this is obviously a very difficult issue for the state.

We have shown through our budget the commitment of this government to disability services. We have the highest funding per capita for disability services of any state and territory in Australia. The increase this year of 7.9 per cent, as I said, brings the total increase to 34 per cent since 1999–2000.

I will refer, just briefly, to the initiatives that are in the budget. We are providing an additional \$4 million on top of the funding that we have provided previously to assist people to continue to live in the community. This will be delivered through our very successful Home First program. The budget expands, as I said, on the provision of \$16 million over the last four years. This new program provides services to nearly 300 people with cognitive disabilities. The additional services are going to be targeted to those people on the disability service needs register and will assist in easing the demand for support.

On assuming government we were confronted with a very substantial backlog of unmet needs for shared supported accommodation. That was an issue which people had been fighting very hard and long for and on which there had been campaigning from the advocacy groups. We have increased, as I said, the number of supported accommodation places. This budget delivers an \$8 million funding increase over four years; it builds on the previous budget increases and certainly fulfils the election commitment of the government. There was a set target, and we are fulfilling that.

We are also providing an additional \$1 million in the Futures for Young Adults program. The total number of participants in the program is going to increase by 160. People know that this is for young people who have finished education and who are in that transitional period going into employment or day programs or other supported activities. It certainly will ensure that all young people leaving school next year who require assistance from the program. It is now a \$50 million program, and we expect it, with this increase, to exceed 5000 individuals.

Lastly there is Kew Residential Services. Following the Premier's announcement, the budget provides \$25.4 million over four years for the first stage of the redevelopment. Some 100 residents are moving into purpose-built homes right across Melbourne, particularly in the east, north and south — and not in an archaic institution they were in before. I know that that is an absolutely welcome initiative.

Importantly, over and above the recurrent initiatives the budget also provides additional capital funding to build community infrastructure. So \$10 million will be provided for infrastructure over three years. The funding has three main objectives. It will be used to build seven or eight new houses, to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities throughout the community and to improve the fabric of day programs. That is the overview of the community services portfolio.

The CHAIRMAN — Minister, during your presentation you mentioned that the increased spending in the disabilities area over the last three years amounts to 34 per cent. We are all aware that for a whole range of reasons there are a number of pressures and strains on the disabilities services area. Could you detail to this committee what

strategies the government is developing to address that increase in demand for disability services and, along with that, detail what impact this current demand is having on waiting lists across the board for those services and the strategies that you have for that?

Ms PIKE — As you have correctly identified, when we came to government there was a significant amount of demand and a backlog of people requiring support, whether it be accommodation support or in-home support. As a government we are systematically working to address that demand over a period of time. We have funded an additional \$194.6 million into this sector over three years. As you have identified, that is a 34 per cent increase in the disability services budget. This has funded an additional 500 places in home-based support and 238 additional community residential service places, so these are people who were on the service-needs register and who are now receiving services. Twenty-five additional accommodation places are being funded through this budget as the third stage of our LFS committed growth. This growth is represented as part of the increased client base and the shared supported accommodation output, and you can see that in the budget paper. We are also of course relocating 100 Kew residents as part of that as well.

As I have said, our funding per person for people with profound or severe disabilities exceeds that of all other jurisdictions. The demand reflects population increases, but there are also other critical factors. Ageing of carers is a major issue for us as a community. It is a national issue, and that is why we have asked the commonwealth to continue its funding of the unmet needs. The commonwealth recognises this as well, which is why there was an injection of additional money through the commonwealth–state disability agreement. We are pressing very hard for a continuation of that specific allocation to address this national issue for us and with us over the next five years — the period of the disability agreement.

I also need to point out that we have made some changes to the service needs register, because that is the mechanism by which the department determines who is eligible for new or vacant places. It does not necessarily reflect the true extent of unmet demand, as some people do not put their names on the register or in the past other agencies may have put their names on their own registers, so they had their own lists. That was the situation in the past. Now we have improved the register to reflect applications for different service types. We have integrated it, so we have picked up additional people who were on other registers, and that in a sense has made our service needs register more comprehensive. But what it has meant is that the comparisons are more difficult because we now count referrals, we do not count individuals — and as I said, we have integrated the waiting lists.

The other thing we have added to the waiting list is another category of people who were not on the register before, and that is people with acquired brain injury. They were very much under-represented. As you know, there are some people with acquired brain injury — younger people — who are inappropriately in nursing homes. But through our ABI strategic plan we have placed them on the service needs register as well, so we are very conscious that we have increased that service needs register. As I said, comparisons are now not as meaningful as they may have been because of changes to that. I think I have probably covered most of your questions.

The CHAIRMAN — Just to clarify what you were saying, the list as it now stands includes people who were out there seeking services but who were not on the list — or they may have been on a different list.

Ms PIKE — Yes, that is right.

The CHAIRMAN — So they have been aggregated, and it is also now recording demand for services rather than individuals who are requiring service, so if a person — —

Ms PIKE — Wants different service types — —

The CHAIRMAN — If a person uses five different agencies, that would be counted as five?

Ms PIKE — Yes.

The CHAIRMAN — Whereas in the past it might be counted as one?

Ms PIKE — I will refer that to Arthur Rogers, who is the executive director of disability services.

Mr ROGERS — Your summary is essentially correct, that currently we place people in different categories of the service needs register so that if they are looking for shared supported accommodation their name is put against that; and if they are also looking for day placement their name is put against that. In the past we have often recorded it only once.

The CHAIRMAN — As the person, rather than as the demand for services?

Mr ROGERS — As the person. The practice was variable between regions, so it was not very consistent. Generally it would have been recorded, but not in as much detail as it is these days in terms of the services. So we have a better understanding of the demand for the different service types, and we have also included the home first and the home accommodation support areas in the waiting list, so we now understand the service needs register better than we did in the past.

Ms PIKE — So before it was mainly accommodation — people wanting CRUs, basically, were on the list. Now it is a much more comprehensive list.

Mr CLARK — Can you give us a breakdown of how the waiting list is currently made up — the numbers in the specific categories — either now or on notice?

Mr ROGERS — I can give them to you for April 2002. I only have three categories.

Ms PIKE — We can make that more comprehensive.

Mr ROGERS — The service needs register has different categories, and I have the urgent ones here. It was 997 for shared supported accommodation, 666 for home first, and 593 for day programs. That was as at April 2002.

Ms BARKER — Minister, in terms of ensuring that people are registered against their need, would that then ensure a better opportunity for planning what future services may be required? That has been one of the problems in identifying future planning and how you are going to attend to those needs.

Ms PIKE — That is right. When people think about their possible needs they often come at a crisis point and think the only option is to be in a CRU or an accommodation environment, whereas in working with them and with case planners, supporters and carers you can often find more appropriate models that are more designed to meet the needs of those individuals.

The CHAIRMAN — I congratulate you on that change. I think it is very good to have measures that actually show the demand and the requirement for service rather than some nebulous figure that does not really line up — and it is what this committee has been seeking across all departments for a long time.

Mr CLARK — I shall follow on this subject to just focus on the magnitude of the problem being confronted. The figures we have just been given show that something in excess of 1500 in total, or maybe 1600 people, are urgently looking for accommodation, and there may be some degree of overlap in that. In comparison, you have told us that 70 additional places are being provided for in-the-home services in the forthcoming year, and 25 for shared support accommodation. It seems to me just on those figures that we are not making a lot of inroads into the numbers on the register. Even if no additional people join the register it will take a long time to get the numbers down.

Can you give the committee more details on how many people are joining or expected to join register each year in comparison with the number for whom places are being provided? Are there people leaving the register for reasons other than being accommodated — for example, they have died or moved interstate, et cetera? What is the net growth that we are expecting on the register over coming years? What is your plan to manage what I assume will be a growing problem with ageing parents, and so on, as you referred to? Do you have a target number that you would like to get the different categories of the register down to? What sorts of costs or budget increases do you expect to need over coming years in order to manage the growing need for accommodation?

Ms PIKE — I might take the latter part of your question first and talk about it broadly and then I will ask Mr Rogers to fill in some of the specific details regarding the growth, et cetera. We are aware that there is a demand issue, and I was quite open about that. Clearly the figures reflect that. We know that we are in the context of an ageing population and ageing carers too, so we are at a very challenging and difficult point.

I believe this government has made a very significant investment in its period in office, particularly when you look at 500 additional places in the residential sector and the additional Homefirst recipients, and when you also identify that a service system redefinition has to occur because we still have inappropriately large institutions. While that work has been progressing over the years we have now set the target for Kew, and others will need to be redeveloped over time. We are continuing to reinvest in that demand. But the department is also very conscious that

it needs to be more intentional about a demand strategy. That is why, as I said, we have worked on it this year and will bring into the budget process next year a demand strategy.

We have heard nothing from the commonwealth yet. Its efforts in terms of unmet needs were there over the two years 2000 and 2001. We would be very keen for the commonwealth to uphold that effort — because, as I said, this is a national issue — and not only to uphold that effort but not do anything that would actually exacerbate the situation for these demands. Quite clearly 30 000 people being moved from disability pensions to the Newstart allowance is not going to do anything to help stabilise people's lifestyle circumstances so that they can continue to live within the community and have additional support.

I also want to say that we have put additional resources in at the front end of disability services, and that is part of demand management strategy. I spoke to the committee about the preschool participation of younger people with disabilities. There are a number of initiatives in community care that we see as early intervention and that is a very important part of it. I will ask Mr Rogers to talk about the specific growth numbers and those factors.

Mr ROGERS — I do not have available the actual numbers for the rate of people entering the waiting list. The projected growth of people with profound or severe disability is around 4 per cent per annum, but I do not have available the specific figures for the waiting list. As you mentioned, Mr Clark, the reasons for leaving the waiting list are either obtaining a service or the death of the person in some cases, and in other cases people may have obtained alternative services or their circumstances have changed. But, I am sorry, I do not have the specific figures on hand.

Mr CLARK — Perhaps you can take some of that on notice. I am interested in how the future goes and what your planning is in a best sense equally as important as the best guess of the reality, in terms of what you are expecting to happen and how you intend to respond to what you expect to be happening.

Mr ROGERS — I shall just add one comment to what the minister said. Over the past number of years the service needs register has reflected those people who had reached some point of crisis in their term of support for the person with a disability. The work we have projected to do around demand management is to try to assist people over some time with early interventions and help with transition planning for different times of their lives. Essentially that is the feedback we have had from people with disabilities and their families: the need for assisting them with earlier planning to actually anticipate different times of their lives such as ageing or transition from school. That is one of the key themes of changing the pattern of demand for disability services over the next 10 years.

Ms BARKER — Minister, you referred in your presentation to a key priority being the finalisation and implementation of the state disability plan. As the committee is aware and as was reported in the budget estimates in 2000–01, the formulation of the state disability plan has commenced and it will be finalised and released. I am pleased to see that a key priority is the finalisation and implementation of the state plan. I am sure we are hearing about some of the issues that were raised during the consultation period on the development of the state plan in terms of the needs and planning for the future. Could you provide the committee with some more information about where that state disability plan is at and when we can expect it to be finalised and implemented?

Ms PIKE — As you have correctly identified, the state disability plan is a key policy initiative of this government. We are on schedule to release it in the second half of this year. The development of the plan has been a very extensive and comprehensive process. We have had a lot of consultation with the Victorian community, and that is right and proper. One of the things we identify in the disability area is that people see disability as the problem or the issue for disabled people and their carers alone, and yet we know that for people's life chances and circumstances to change there needs to be a far greater openness within the whole community to the rights and contributions of people with disabilities.

As I said, the plan has been based on very broad consultation. The second period was undertaken following the release of the draft disability plan in October 2001; more than 1350 people actually participated in this consultation on the plan — parents, people with disabilities, families, carers, service providers, the commonwealth, the non-government sector, local government and members of the broader community. They provided a huge amount of very valuable feedback. It was very rich and comprehensive and there was a lot of it. We also received 300 submissions from across the community to add value to the plan, so that has taken a lot of time. We wanted to absolutely capture those sentiments in the plan and incorporate them into the final state disability plan. We are now very close to releasing that in the second half of this year.

This is really a first for Victoria, a genuine whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to people with a disability. I identified that before when I talked about the low level of participation of people with a disability in the generic service system. We see that as a key objective, but also a fundamental underpinning of people's rights to participate and have not only the same opportunities but also the same responsibilities and obligations as members of the broader community.

As I said, this is one of the key strategic directions for this government. I am certainly looking forward to the release of the plan, and I know that the broader sector is also anticipating it because of the initiatives with service reform that will be contained within the plan and also the fact that it is a whole-of-government statement and a very important Victorian initiative.

Mr DAVIS — Minister, could you show me where in the budget there is funding for specialist early intervention services for children with disabilities and impairments? Other than perhaps for preschool, I cannot find any area in the budget that deals with that. It is quite an important area, in the sense that often preschool-age intervention is too late and intervention at an earlier point often maximises the effect and enables the life opportunities of children with a disability or an impairment to be maximised. I wonder if you can point to where that is in the budget — if, indeed, it is there?

Ms PIKE — Sure. In fact \$1.65 million was allocated in 2002–03 to these services, in the 2003 academic year, rising to \$3.38 million in 2003–04.

Mr DAVIS — To how much?

Ms PIKE — To \$3.38 million. The funds are provided through the preschool support program to enable more children with severe and complex disabilities — or needs — to access preschool. These funds will enable an additional 50 children with severe and complex needs to access a range of services that will assist them to actively participate in preschool.

We have also provided funding for the preschool field officer program, which is also there to address service demand and enable these children — there are nearly 9 per cent of children who have a particular need — to be supported. I might also add that since coming to office we have increased early intervention funding by \$12.8 million.

Mr DAVIS — Is that for that group that I am interested in, the group before preschool in particular?

Ms PIKE — Yes. So the recurrent funding has been increased by \$3 million, and that also includes funds for allied health services. Pam might like to add something to that as well.

Ms WHITE — Yes, just to add to the last point, in 2001–02 five community health services received recurrent funds for allied health services, particularly for speech therapy — which, when you go out and survey parents, is one of the very high demand things, because speech therapy does not just deal with speech; it also deals with being able to swallow food and things like that as well. So that tends to reach the children with severe disabilities.

Mr DAVIS — Do you have a breakdown of that that we could access?

Ms PIKE — Certainly, we can provide that.

Mr DAVIS — That would be helpful. Do you have any outcome measures for that sort of area? I mean, it seems to me that there is no — —

Ms WHITE — No.

Mr DAVIS — Are there any plans to develop any output measures for this?

Ms WHITE — Yes.

Ms PIKE — Yes.

Mr DAVIS — Good.

Ms BARKER — You are constantly improving things, aren't you, Minister?

Ms PIKE — Yes.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to ask you about the community participation output group which is on page 82 of budget paper 3.

Ms PIKE — That is on disabilities?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Yes, it is. According to the budget papers, this year you are targeting to provide an extra 100 — client days, I presume — clients with day activities, service an extra 100 clients, and additionally service an extra 160 people under the Futures for Young Adults program, comparing this year's budget to last year's budget. But at the same time the output cost for that group has declined slightly; the budget has been reduced. How does the department plan to provide the increased level of service to clients with a reduced budget for that output group?

Ms PIKE — Yes, there has been a change to the output costs, and they have only been published in the last three budgets. The costing methodologies and output charging policies are things we are continuing to work on. We are certainly looking for more appropriate ways to attribute charges. The other thing that I will note about the futures program is that it is not one where people get locked in and stay in futures forever. The additional funding we are providing this year is also on top of the fact that people are leaving the program. When people leave the program, that funding that was allocated to that person is also returned to the department, which then reallocates that funding to provide additional resources. I am also advised that in this budget the overheads have been attributed differently in this particular output. I might get Arthur to explain that more comprehensively.

Mr ROGERS — The budget changes include an additional \$1 million for the Futures for Young Adults program, which the minister mentioned previously. As we have been doing output costs over the past couple of budgets we have found that there have been some different practices in attributing overhead costs to outputs. That has led to some discrepancies year on year.

So the change of the 2002–03 targets actually reflects a change to the attribution of overheads. It does not actually reflect a true reduction in the provision of services or the provision of dollars to that output cost. As I mentioned, there is an extra million dollars for the futures program.

Ms PIKE — There are actually more people being provided with the service.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — So those two budget figures, last year's and this year's, are not comparable?

Mr ROGERS — Because of the change in the way we have attributed overheads, you could not conclude from the figures that there has actually been a million added — or money taken out of the budget by a few hundred thousand dollars. It is just that the way we have attributed overheads to that output has changed the figures. In a sense they are not comparable because it does not reflect the fact that there is a million dollars extra into that output group.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Are you able to break down the costing of those output groups so we can see how much is attributed to overheads versus how much actually goes to service delivery, so we can see where the gains are?

Mr ROGERS — I do not have those figures here — —

Ms PIKE — Not here.

Mr ROGERS — But they would be available, yes.

Ms PIKE — Yes.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I know you have mentioned the million dollar increase for the futures program, which was in the minister's presentation. That reflects the increased 160 clients in that program. Are there similar increases in funding for the day activities, where there is also an increase of 100 in the number of services or the number of clients who will be serviced?

Mr ROGERS — The change in the day programs principally reflects that people are leaving Kew Residential Services and many of them will pick up additional day program activities. So the increase there is

mostly that, and it reflects a small change to the way some people in the Futures for Young Adults program move into generic programs or ordinary day programs.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Is the funding for the people from Kew included in the output costs for this group?

Mr ROGERS — It would be, but I do not actually have the figure here.

Ms PIKE — To break it out.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — When you get the breakdown could you highlight what that is, please?

Mr ROGERS — Yes.

The CHAIRMAN — By way of a quick follow-up to Mr Rich-Phillips's question, what you have done here in removing overheads and other administration, et cetera, out of this is actually putting more focus than has been done in the past on how much is going into service. In the past that figure may have appeared to be for service delivery but would have included a range of other things.

Mr ROGERS — Over the past three budgets we have moved towards output costs in true attribution of costs.

Ms PIKE — They have gradually been changed.

Mr ROGERS — They would not have been as clear prior to this current system. We are now showing a more accurate attribution of costs. However, it has taken us a few years to get that attribution consistent and we are doing more work in the forthcoming year to make sure that that is more accurate than it has been in the past.

Ms WHITE — Constantly improving things.

The CHAIRMAN — But eventually we will have an output figure from year to year showing some money that is going to services rather than money going to services plus all your overheads plus all your administration costs. That is what you are aiming for?

Mr ROGERS — The total cost will include the overheads, but it will be shown against the cost of the service.

The CHAIRMAN — But it is related to the actual service?

Ms WHITE — Consistent with planning for the future as well.

The CHAIRMAN — Minister, I take you to an issue that this committee has had considerable interest in for some time, as I think you would be aware, and that is of the child protection system in Victoria. From memory, I think we delivered a report on child protection late last year and we were gratified that the previous minister wrote back to us saying that that report was of value.

With reference to the issues identified in that report, how have some of those issues been picked up and addressed through the budget? In particular, how is the department going to use the substantial increase that has been announced in the 2002–03 budget to address the growing demand for child protection and placement services?

Can I ask you also to address within that answer the issue of gross overrepresentation of Aboriginal children within the child protection and placement system, what is being done about that specific aspect and in general and, because it is another issue for the committee, whether you are looking at any innovative ways to deliver through the child protection and placement system rather than through what might be called the traditional ways of addressing placements within the system?

Ms PIKE — People are aware that the state budget this year announced \$65 million over four years for an integrated strategy to begin to address a number of the challenges that face us in the child protection system. We know the history of this. There has been a massive increase in notifications since the introduction of mandatory reporting, but basically substantiations of notifications have remained pretty steady over that period, with some 61 per cent representing re-referrals and a vast overrepresentation of Aboriginal children within the system. We know that there are substantial challenges there for us.

That is why the department did engage a major piece of work in consultation with the central agencies prior to this last budget to identify some of the key hot points in the child protection system and the strategies we could develop to contain and in the long term reduce the growing demand by focusing more on preventive and diversionary services.

The first component of expenditure in this area is \$3.7 million this year for eight innovation projects — two of which will involve Koori projects, and I will speak to them in a moment when I talk about the services for Aboriginal children — and those are very innovative because they are going to target those people who come into the system again and again. The projects will look to strengthen the service capacities to support those vulnerable families.

We know when people come into the child protection system that while the immediate presenting issue is the abuse of a child, which is absolutely horrific and we have a responsibility to protect that child above all, there is often a whole plethora of family issues, and many of those are intergenerational. They may involve people who are poor, marginalised and excluded from the community, people with drug and alcohol abuse, people with mild intellectual disabilities or with psychiatric and mental health issues. All are more highly represented in the statistics for child abuse than other people.

We are establishing projects in Ballarat in the Central Goldfields area, in East Gippsland, Frankston, Geelong and Shepparton, where child protection workers will work largely within community service organisations that have a broader family support role to train them to focus intensive support on these families. We will be watching the projects very closely, monitoring and evaluating them because we see them as the potential key to trying to address the 61 per cent renotification figure.

The other area we know to be true — and it makes commonsense, doesn't it? — is that children who have been significantly abused are also overrepresented in other parts of our service system. They are more likely to be kids who are in placement and support agencies. They are more likely to be young people who find their way into the juvenile justice system. It is terrible, but large numbers of people in the women's prison and in our overall prison population are people who have been victims of abuse, so it is important to try to provide a response.

Our child protection system is very much focused on responding to critical points — it is an investigative system which focuses back on the courts and seeks to substantiate or dismiss a report. Once the family is, in a sense, either in a substantiation mode or has moved on and is getting some support, often the child who has been a potential victim of that abuse is left, so a new intensive treatment service will be established for children and young people who have been seriously abused. We are working within a framework called Looking After Children, which is a comprehensive and very proven approach to promoting positive outcomes. Most of these kids are in out-of-home care, but they really need that intensive kind of support. That is a \$5 million project.

Some \$4.2 million will go towards 60 new child protection workers and support positions to deal with the increase in workload, and \$1.2 million for additional kinship care and permanent care placements. Kinship care is a new program that is proving to be very successful, with a lot of good outcomes. As I said, the ongoing \$5 million in this budget is for our capital program.

We are having to build purpose-built facilities. Some of our young people are very damaged and require very specialist support and care, as we know. We also need to keep upgrading the standard of our physical facilities.

To highlight the two initiatives around overrepresentation of Aboriginal people: as I said, two of those innovation projects will be in Aboriginal communities. We are working with the Aboriginal child specialist advice and support service and the Mildura Aboriginal Cooperative to identify those specialist services. They are very targeted and highly culturally relevant and appropriate services.

The other thing we have done this year is put some additional funding into the area of working with Aboriginal agencies to support them in dealing with Aboriginal young people who come to the attention of child protection. Too many Aboriginal children are being dealt with by the white community, and there are a lot of problems with that. We have now signed a protocol with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) to ensure that representatives of the Aboriginal community are involved in the decision-making around what will happen to Aboriginal children if they need to be in out-of-home care or they come to the attention of the child protection system. This replaces a protocol that was there in 1992. We have set aside \$2.4 million over four years to develop these initiatives and promote the linkages between child protection, the Aboriginal child protection system and the Aboriginal community.

Mr CLARK — I was contacted about a fortnight ago by a constituent with a child who is due to turn 18 at the end of the year and therefore come on to the Futures for Young Adults program. This constituent was very concerned that to that point she had not heard anything about the implementation of the arrangements for that to happen, in contrast with past years where by this time of year parents would have been invited to have their child assessed and attend briefings and interviews, et cetera. She was very worried about whether changes might be in the wind for the Futures for Young Adults program. I see from page 44 of the Department of Human Services questionnaire response to the committee that there has been an evaluation of the program undertaken. It appears that announcements are pending unless they have been made since the questionnaire was answered. Can you tell the committee what the government has in mind for the Futures for Young Adults program for next year and whether there is anything that would give grounds for concern to parents of children reaching the age to join that program?

Ms PIKE — As we have indicated, an additional \$1 million has been allocated to the futures program in this year's budget, taking the budget base to \$52.5 million. We believe that that \$1 million will be sufficient to meet the cohort that are leaving school this year and moving into the program. That is because of the churn — the rollover in the program with people leaving it and freeing up additional resources. Students exiting school in 2002 will be asked to complete an application form to enable them to receive support from futures. That is to ensure that the assistance is targeted to those who require specialist disability services. We want young people to participate fully in their local communities through employment and education and training. We want to ensure that people do not automatically jump into the futures program if there is another pathway that may be more appropriate for them.

However, let me say that where the futures program is needed and required next year then that service will be available for the people who need it. We just think that we need to provide more education to families and young people about other options that might be available to them and the way those options can be offered. The application process will direct students to mainstream entrance points such as Centrelink and the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre. Some people do not even think about these things as options for them. We will be providing funding for them to ensure that those options are supported, if that is required.

As I said quite clearly, futures is a very individual-focused program. We do not provide the same set amount of money for everyone: it can range from \$7000 a year for a low-support-need person through to \$20 000 for a person who has a much higher support need. We have conducted an evaluation of the program. We are considering it and will be discussing it with peak bodies, schools and other bodies during the year. However, there is no moving away from the commitment to futures — we are just trying to develop and enhance the program. Mr Rogers might like to add some other points if you need further clarification.

Mr CLARK — It may be inadvertent, but I am very suspicious that your answer is a circumspect way of saying that there are unpleasant changes in the wind and that some people who are now eligible will be missing out.

Ms PIKE — I think I actually said quite clearly that anyone who requires the service and is eligible for the service next year will receive the service. However, part of what we were hearing through the evaluation of this program is that there were some young people who, given some additional financial support, may be given the opportunity to go to a TAFE college or even a university and may be given the opportunity to be in employment. I think people would affirm that as an option; it is certainly the agenda that the federal government is very keen to pursue for people with disabilities. I do not believe there is any truth whatsoever in any view that the services will no longer be available or that people who are eligible will not have a service — they will have a service.

Mr CLARK — When will parents be informed of the options available for them this year?

Mr ROGERS — We have advised the regional offices' contact people on futures of these minor amendments to the program for next year. I think they are now in the process of talking to special schools and general schools. It may vary a little bit between regions but, as I understand it, that process is happening now.

Ms BARKER — I again take you back to your presentation where you referred to a key challenge under the disability portfolio in terms of the work force we have and ensuring that we can recruit, retain and develop a work force that can deliver greater flexibility and choice to people with disabilities. One of your key priorities was to improve support and work force development. Something that we have noted through a range of hearings into disability services is the need to provide that training and development to staff in the disability sector. Could you give us any information as to whether there are any plans to enhance the skills of staff working in this very important sector, not only in terms of the retention of staff but also in terms of addressing service quality issues to people with disabilities?

Ms PIKE — As you have identified, we recognise the importance of a well-trained, stable and committed work force. That is fundamental to achieving good outcomes for people with a disability. We have an established disability services training project. We estimate that as many as 2700 untrained staff will utilise this project in the next three years. The uptake so far of trainees into the disability services training project is approximately 600.

We think that is a very positive move because it reflects a desire from staff themselves to enhance their qualifications and their training. Our unit implemented a strategy to identify, establish, implement and evaluate a learning culture across government and non-government disability services that really will improve the quality of services.

The other thing we know is that we do have to identify individual pathways for staff. Every staff member is different — every staff member's level of commitment is different. But also every staff member's personal circumstances — the hours they work, their family configuration, their previous employment and experience history, the capacity to get recognition for prior learning — all of those things mean that we have had to be very targeted in the way that we have the project put together. But we also know that career pathways are crucial. People do not want a dead-end job. They want to know that they can go somewhere and that they can learn something.

We have worked to put together a consortium of training providers. I was out at VUT a couple of weeks ago actually launching the \$9 million program with commonwealth government assistance. As I said, it is a consortium, led by RMIT. It has currently signed up 600 trainees who will now work through a competency-based training program. I think this is a very good way to go because people can continue to work, they can learn on the job, their skills will be enhanced, they will be in a communal learning environment and they of course will be part of a whole process of lifelong learning.

Our aim is that eventually all disability development and support officers will be provided with the opportunity to achieve a minimum of certificate 4 in community services specialising in disability work, which is a very marked improvement over today's situation. Of course the project enhances partnerships as well.

The other thing I want to identify is that part of the 2001 Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) enterprise agreement that the government was party to talked about improving the skills of the work force. I think that is very important because during the 1990s there was less attention paid to staff qualifications, there was the introduction of non-qualified staff into disability services and in fact training expenditure was reduced. So we know that we have needed to make some changes in that regard. It has certainly been part of our agreement, and certainly it is something that the agencies and the work force has been calling for. But also we know that a trained work force is absolutely critical to recruitment and retention and to quality of service in this area.

Ms BARKER — As a follow-up perhaps I will ask this question and Mr Davis might be interested. You talked about the retention of staff and you also referred to the HACSU enterprise bargaining agreement. Obviously part of the retention of staff is wage award and appropriate increases. Do you have any detail of the potential outcomes of the agreement and whether that has an impact on the budget?

Ms PIKE — The agreement I referred to in my previous answer was the agreement that was signed with the government sector and that was in 2001. We are of course currently in the environment where the non-government sector has a claim before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. We know that this claim is seeking parity with the government sector. It is really a claim by the workers against their employers, but of course the government is party by way of being one of the funding bodies. We are closely engaged in that process. We have put a total commitment of \$15.49 million on the table from the government's perspective for additional funding in this particular case, but it is currently before the commission and we are anticipating its outcome.

We do accept that workers in the non-government sector have not done as well in the enterprise environment over the last few years and we know that there is some catching up to do. We think the government's offer is fair and reasonable at this stage. It doubles the sleep-over allowance, it provides additional funding for therapists and it narrows the gap. But of course it is within a fiscally responsible framework.

Mr DAVIS — Minister, I want to take you to the issue of foster carers who receive, as I understand it, approximately \$85 a week for a baby in Victoria compared to \$175 in New South Wales. This has been the subject, as I understand it, of considerable interest by the Productivity Commission in terms of the moving through of the number of placements in foster care, and so forth, and some comparative analysis. I know the *Herald Sun* examined the Productivity Commission report recently, on 11 February. If you do not mind, I will quote from the *Herald Sun* article, 'Victorian children are being shuffled between foster homes more than in any other state,

according to a Productivity Commission report. More than 40 per cent of children who had been in foster care for a year or longer lived in four or more homes'. Certainly people like the Children's Welfare Association and other groups have made comments about this and the concerns that surround it. I wonder in that context why there does not appear to be any particular response as such in terms of funding in the budget? Maybe you can outline to me how your government intends to respond to those concerns in the forthcoming period?

Ms PIKE — You have raised two issues in that question. First of all you have talked about the level of reimbursement — I will address that. Then you have talked the number of placements.

Mr DAVIS — Which are linked in fact, I think, quite closely.

Ms PIKE — I will get to that. We know that caregivers do receive reimbursement to cover their daily costs associated with children in care. We also provide additional discretionary funding to cover additional and exceptional costs, so that immediately calls into question some of the figures that the *Herald Sun* has provided.

Mr DAVIS — Do you think they are not accurate?

Ms PIKE — Our rates are actually comparable with those in most Australian states, when all additional funds provided to carers are included in comparison. New South Wales does pay more, and we need to acknowledge that, but let me talk about what the additional funds are. In fact, when the additional discretionary funds are taken into account, particularly for children under 13 years of age, we can see that the gap narrows. Some of the discretionary payments are for things like child care, equipment, additional therapeutic services — —

Mr DAVIS — Specialist things — requirements for children.

Ms PIKE — Yes.

Mr DAVIS — The point I am making is that I was very proud to attend the annual general meeting of the Foster Care Association last year. It was put to me very strongly that the reimbursement was not adequate and people gave many examples of pieces of equipment and assistance that they did need. Some of them said to me it was like getting blood out of a stone to get additional resources that were required for children who needed assistance,

Ms PIKE — I am trying to answer the component of your question where you talked about the base rate as if that was the only payment that is made to foster carers for the care of children. I am saying to you that particularly for children over the age of 13 years, when you add the additional resources that are available for specialist services and additional costs — one-off costs, other services — that the rates are actually comparable. Nevertheless let me say to you — —

Mr DAVIS — That is certainly not the belief of people in the sector, and that was put to me in the strongest terms.

Ms PIKE — Let me say to you that I am well aware of the Foster Care Association and spoke at its annual conference last weekend, and we have been working very closely with it. Over the last three budgets of this government we have injected 34 per cent additional resources into a range of community care services. In our first year, for example, we significantly tackled the placement and support service system. In this year we are significantly tackling the child protection section which has a direct impact on this foster care area. In this coming year we are undertaking a comprehensive review of home-based care, which is the next segment of this whole area of work within the department. We are looking very closely at the levels of reimbursement and support available to foster carers, who have told me that certainly reimbursement is an issue and we need to tackle that but also there are other service support services they need: training, capacity to join with each other in groups and learn particular strategies. They need — —

The CHAIRMAN — I think — —

Ms PIKE — Can I finish? I will just complete. They also need higher level support from agencies and the department for particularly challenging behaviours. So that is another dimension of the review. We have also funded the Foster Care Association a significant amount of money to participate in this review because we know that it is absolutely critical to this review. We know also that the foster care system sits in the range of service responses that there are to families and children who are in families that need protection and support. So it fits in that whole continuum.

Mr DAVIS — It is the key spot for much of the care, isn't it, really? People who are coming in from different areas — unless you are resourcing that properly — are obviously going to —

The CHAIRMAN — It is not purely cash, is it?

Mr DAVIS — No, it is not.

Ms PIKE — No, and that is what they are telling us. Yes, foster care is a very large part of out-of-home care and that is because it has grown up traditionally to be that large out-of-home care component. But there are other developing strategies in out-of-home care too. The kinship care program is growing. We have provided a lot of support to residential care and permanent care.

We acknowledge that foster care is the area that we need to do some additional work on, but we do not want to deal with foster care as an isolated part of the service system; we want to deal with it as part of the residential care, the kinship care, the permanent care components of the service system too — the additional money we have put into the child protection areas, those innovation projects and also the intensive therapeutic projects are all designed to try to minimise our demand for out-of-home placement.

We believe firmly the majority of children are best in their family homes and that we need to support and strengthen the families to be able to care for their family members appropriately. Where there has been a disaster or a terrible situation and a child has been removed we want to make sure that we have the range of service responses that are most appropriate for that child. Foster care is a very key part of that and that is why this year we are focusing on that component as we have on the other components in our previous years.

Mr DAVIS — But there seems to be a real resistance to increasing that base payment, which seems to me to be not a large amount in terms of the reimbursement of the costs of a child, who may have additional requirements of course, but just at a base level the \$85 does not seem —

Ms PIKE — I think 'resistance' is an inappropriate word. I have just explained to you that we are undertaking a major and comprehensive review of home-based care this year. We acknowledge that level of reimbursement is an issue we have to look at. It is clearly there in the terms of reference. I have articulated that to the Foster Care Association. It is a voluntary organisation, but I have given it additional resources so it can employ someone. The carers can work with us — they are on the reference group for this piece of work — so we value this area very highly and we know that as part of the whole range of the service system we need to enhance it and develop it.

Ms BARKER — That would tie into the unanimous recommendation adopted by this committee in the child protection report that it is important to look not just at the base or the remuneration of the base but also at the linkages to other services, additional and necessary services and equipment. So it is part of one of this committee's previous reports as well that it is not just about the base but about the linkages and other services that may and should be available.

The CHAIRMAN — Do you wish to respond to that?

Ms PIKE — No.

Mr DAVIS — We agree, I think.

Ms PIKE — Yes. You also identified the average number of out-of-home placements and correctly identified that this is again another challenge for us. It is a negative aspect of out-of-home care. However, we believe it should not be treated in isolation with our other initiatives. Let me identify an area where that is critical. What we know from foster carers and from young people who are in the care of the department broadly is that a number of them are now presenting with far more challenging behaviour than they have previously, and that foster carers are finding that behaviour to be the critical issue in the breakdown of the placement — not the amount of money but the difficulty in dealing with a challenging young person. In the majority of cases the reason for that enormously challenging behaviour is the systematic abuse that that child has received. That is why in our child protection framework, the \$65 million strategy, we have this very important intensive therapeutic program which identifies those young people who have been very severely damaged and works very closely with them to try to address that challenging behaviour.

Out of that whole range of responses that is one that we believe will feed into our understanding of foster care and will also help us to deal with the multiplicity of breakdowns that is too high, and we acknowledge the number is too high.

Mr DAVIS — Will the review that you refer to take into account additional equipment, and so forth, that is required? It was very strongly put to me that people have enormous difficulty getting equipment at the departmental level and at the regional level, and that quite small requests are put through enormous hoops to achieve that funding level.

Ms PIKE — I would be very pleased if you could provide me, on another occasion, with an example of that. We provide resources to agencies that work with us in a partnership way to deliver support for foster carers, and if you can provide me with a specific illustration where a person has asked for a piece of equipment and that has been denied, I would be very interested in that information.

Mr DAVIS — I would be happy to do that.

The CHAIRMAN — That concludes — —

Mr CLARK — Mr Chairman, I believe we have not run for the full scheduled time for this session of the hearing. The session started at 11.02 a.m. or 11.03 a.m., so we were delayed by 15 or 20 minutes on commencement. We also had about a 27-minute opening presentation from the minister and not all members of the committee have even had an opportunity to ask two questions. I believe the time has not properly been reckoned — —

The CHAIRMAN — No, the time has concluded. You are correct, and I made the note of 11.03 a.m. when we started this session, and the 1 hour and 35 minutes has been completed.

Mr DAVIS — Before we conclude, Mr Chairman, on another entirely separate point — —

The CHAIRMAN — No, hold on, on this point.

Mr DAVIS — No, you finish that point.

The CHAIRMAN — No, this is the only point.

Mr DAVIS — I just wanted to make another point.

Mr CLARK — Mr Chairman, according to our agenda the 1 hour and 35 minutes that was scheduled was for questions, not for the entire hearing, and the questions commenced at 11.29 a.m.

The CHAIRMAN — No, that is not the way we have operated in any hearing in the past three years. It would be quite a change from the way we have operated. We have always operated cooperatively in relation to those arrangements. We have operated cooperatively in regard to the break, and we have operated cooperatively in the matter of adding time where there has been an unreasonable delay. That is what I have done in relation to this session. I do not think we are being at all unreasonable here. The time has been concluded. I propose that the hearing be adjourned.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I just make the point that we had a considerable delay between the session on the housing portfolio and the session on the community services portfolio, which was considerably longer than we would normally have.

The CHAIRMAN — That is why we commenced that session from the time we started and are finishing a bit later than 12.30 p.m.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — The point Mr Clark made was that the agenda shows 1 hour 35 minutes allocated for questions on community services, which would take us through to 1 p.m.

The CHAIRMAN — I suggest there is no point in keeping the minister here for this discussion. This committee is adjourned.

Committee adjourned.