

# **TRANSCRIPT**

## **SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE 2026 COMMONWEALTH GAMES BID**

### **Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid**

Melbourne – Thursday 26 October 2023

#### **MEMBERS**

David Limbrick – Chair

Joe McCracken – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

David Davis

Jacinta Ermacora

Michael Galea

Sarah Mansfield

Tom McIntosh

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

**WITNESS**

Harriet Shing.

**The CHAIR:** We will now resume the committee's public hearings for the Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, can you please state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing today.

**Harriet SHING:** Sure. Harriet Shing, member of the Legislative Council, former Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy.

**The CHAIR:** Excellent. Thank you for appearing today. I do not think we need to introduce the committee; we all know each other.

**Harriet SHING:** No, thank you.

**The CHAIR:** We welcome your opening comments but ask please that they be kept to a maximum of around 10 minutes to ensure we have time for questions.

**Harriet SHING:** Sure. Thank you, Chair. Good morning to you and to members of the committee, fellow colleagues in the upper house. I begin my statement by acknowledging the Wurundjeri people, the traditional owners of the lands upon which we meet today, and I pay my respects to their elders past and present and also to emerging leaders. I would also like to pay my respects to all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be joining today.

By way of context and introduction, I was the Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy from 14 December 2022 until I signed my resignation from this portfolio on 18 July 2023 following announcement of the cancellation of the 2026 Commonwealth Games. This resignation took effect on and from 20 July 2023. I was the Minister for Regional Development from 14 December 2022 until 2 October 2023. Relevantly to the terms of reference for this inquiry, I was appointed as Minister for Housing on 2 October this year.

As the Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy I was responsible for a range of legacy outcomes from the games. In particular my responsibilities included the cultural program, opening and closing ceremonies, First Nations engagement, workforce and spectator accommodation, skills and training, volunteers, education and schools programs, accessibility and inclusion, environment and sustainability and the baton relay. The legacy portfolio was informed by legacy pillars to develop and implement projects and programs for really enduring and positive social, community and economic outcomes across rural and regional Victoria beyond the 12 days of the 2026 Commonwealth Games themselves.

This work was underpinned by a number of legacy pillars as follows: First Peoples accessibility and inclusion, economic legacy, social legacy, environmental legacy and sport and wellbeing legacy. Along with the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery, as that portfolio then existed, I hosted roundtable events in Bendigo on 15 March, Traralgon on 17 March, Shepparton on 24 March, Geelong on 28 March and Ballarat on 31 March 2023. Attendees at these forums included representatives from councils; First Nations communities; industry and business and sporting organisations; our regional partnerships; multicultural, healthcare, housing, training, disability and community services organisations; and tourism and visitor organisations. The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, and I am going to refer to it as DJSIR from now on, incorporated the Office of the Commonwealth Games, which I will refer to as OCG henceforth, together with the Victoria 2026 organising committee, OC. They were responsible for leading and coordinating the planning and delivery of the

games. The OCG had teams dedicated to the legacy program and delivery of infrastructure, and the organising committee had teams dedicated to cultural programs, ceremonies and accommodation planning. As part of my work in the legacy portfolio I had regular meetings with the teams from the OCG and the OC on planning and preparation work as it related to my legacy portfolio.

On 17 July the Victorian government made the decision not to proceed with hosting the Commonwealth Games in 2026, on the basis that the cost of staging the games had become too high. Cancellation of the Commonwealth Games was announced by the then Premier, former Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery and me in my capacity as former Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy on 18 July 2023. The following day the then Premier, Deputy Premier and I announced a \$2 billion regional package, which is contemplated in the terms of reference for this inquiry, from the \$2.6 billion allocated in the state budget for 2022–23. The regional package includes \$550 million to deliver new and upgraded sporting infrastructure projects across host locations; \$1 billion to build at least 1300 social and affordable homes across rural and regional Victoria; \$150 million for a Regional Worker Accommodation Fund to address housing shortages for key workers across the state beyond the tram tracks; \$150 million for a Regional Tourism and Events Fund; a \$60 million Regional Community Sport Development Fund, which comprises a range of initiatives around infrastructure, community sports programs and other initiatives; a \$40 million all-abilities sports fund to assist with improving accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities; an additional \$10 million investment in grants for tiny towns of up to 5000 people to celebrate the stories, identities and pride of our civic communities around rural and regional Victoria; a \$25 million council support package in recognition of the resourcing and time invested by hub locations in preparation for hosting the Commonwealth Games and to assist in implementation of the regional package, for which there is a not insignificant overlap with the initial objectives of the work; as well as a \$20 million Aboriginal economic development fund to support First Nations businesses and employment programs and to support Aboriginal cultural tourism initiatives. The legacy pillars that are referred to above remain really central to the regional package, and they have informed ongoing discussions and meetings with communities, stakeholders and organisations.

After the announcement of the regional package, I attended online and in-person priority meetings with councils, regional partnerships and community and sporting representatives. I also hosted a series of regional engagement forums in Shepparton on 24 August, Geelong on 7 September, Ballarat on 14 September and Bendigo on 21 September, and a further regional engagement forum has been set for the Latrobe Valley. Attendees at these particular forums included representatives also from councils; First Nations communities; industry, business and sporting organisations; regional partnerships; businesses, multicultural health care; disability, housing, training and community services organisations; and tourism and visitor organisations. Contributions and suggestions provided by attendees during and after these forums have been incorporated into the work undertaken by the Victorian government since the package was announced, at least under the work that I did and had knowledge and foresight of as former Minister for Regional Development.

There is a role for housing in the regional package. No doubt we will have an opportunity to talk to that. I am mindful, however, Chair, that I may well be at the end of my time. But there is constant engagement happening between DJSIR, Homes Victoria and others around the delivery of this \$1 billion housing package, again to address a number of the areas of feedback and priority identified in the course of those regional engagement forums and package forums and discussions which occurred after the announcement of the cancellation. So with those remarks and perhaps a little context, I am happy to hand over to the committee for questions.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Shing. We just heard from Mr Leane. He did not read the business case. Did you look at the business case as part of your responsibility as minister?

**Harriet SHING:** I was given details extracted from the business case about the value proposition of hosting the games. The \$2.6 billion investment, as I said, was accounted for in the 2022–23 budget. That preceded my appointment to the portfolio. So the funding was there, and it was in fact then a matter of delivering on the legacy obligations and responsibilities, as I have outlined them in my opening remarks. So the work had been done, and I was pressing ahead with it on the basis of the work that was contained in information, including the business case.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. One of the responsibilities of your portfolio, which you mentioned, was the opening ceremony and the baton relay. These events would have required costings on logistics, security,

transport and accommodation, all of which were part of the overall blowout in expenses. At what point did you become aware that there might be cost pressures on the overall cost of the games?

**Harriet SHING:** We were in constant conversations across both portfolios, so delivery and legacy, and again I am just going to have to keep distinguishing between that because I suspect there has been an element of confusion, at least that has been evident in question time in the Parliament, between the work undertaken by the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery on the one hand and me in my capacity as former Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy. One of the things that we assessed was how best to deliver the legacy proposals and those pillars within the \$2.6 billion envelope. So there were always conversations happening about how to extract and deliver the best value for money. I think it was Mr Weimar who has provided evidence to this committee around the upward pressures associated with costs for delivery, and it was not a question of the games being impossible, it was about the value proposition in delivering a regional games. The work that we did around understanding impact of cost and upward pressures, for example, and I think you have referred to security, was something which I think was also part of the host contract. That is where any change to that was required to be the subject of agreement between the parties, so the three parties – CGF, CGA and the Victorian government.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Who were the people that you were talking to with regard to project and event management? Was that OCG which was managing all that?

**Harriet SHING:** I had conversations about the way in which that project management could occur for the opening and closing ceremonies. The closing ceremony obviously was the big part of this feature for regional development, the opening ceremony being hosted in Melbourne before everybody then dispersed to those hub locations across regional Victoria. The closing ceremony was part of the conversations around broader procurement. That was indeed part of the conversations that I had with the OC and the OCG, and it was also something which we discussed in thematic terms at those regional engagement forums that I conducted and was part of. And after that, when we pivoted into immediately the regional package, the talk about cultural engagement, festivals, events, attractions and that tourism piece and marketing piece obviously moved directly from the first conversations around the event itself into the lasting legacy. The frame within which I worked was always about what would happen in the delivery of those components of the legacy portfolio but then the momentum created by the event to lead to that really long-lasting impact in the terms that I have described in my opening remarks.

**The CHAIR:** You were saying, if I am hearing you correctly, that it was not a matter of whether or not the games would go ahead. It was a matter of the value proposition because costs were going up. Did you raise concerns about some of these costs? I am not sure how far you got into the detail of say, the opening ceremony. But when you started looking at what the security costs were and where we were going to put everyone, you must have started getting an idea of the costs, and some of those costs clearly were way higher than what was anticipated in the business case. Did you raise those concerns with anyone?

**Harriet SHING:** In the course of conversations about how to deliver the games, it is not dissimilar to any other major project. You look at the way in which variables might change, and in this situation there were variables that changed as a consequence of workforce shortages. I mean, in regional Victoria we have got I think it is a 2.4 per cent unemployment rate at the moment. That is the lowest on record. That in and of itself creates a pressure. The time frames associated with delivering the games were something that required again that constant analysis about impact and, as I think other witnesses have said to this particular inquiry, there are also conversations about materials, about delivery and about making sure that we could amass the workforce needed, including from other parts of the state, and what that would mean in terms of delivery of the rest of an agenda beyond the legacy portfolio.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Shing. The discussion at some point must have turned. We have heard evidence that there was some discussion about reorganising the way the games might look to lower costs or maybe changing the scale of the games. But at some point the conversation must have shifted to the possibility of cancelling the games. At what point did that discussion start from your point of view?

**Harriet SHING:** At what point did the discussion start?

**The CHAIR:** When did it first pop up in a conversation with you that there was a possibility that the games might go?

**Harriet SHING:** Yes, sure. So on 22 June I met with the former Commonwealth Games delivery minister –

**The CHAIR:** Ms Allan?

**Harriet SHING:** Yes, sorry, Minister Allan, the now Premier – and she advised me that cancelling the games was now a matter under consideration in light of those cost pressures.

**The CHAIR:** That was only a few days after she had given evidence to PAEC, wasn't it?

**Harriet SHING:** I am not sure of the date that she gave evidence to PAEC. I gave evidence to PAEC on 8 June, and it was on the 22nd that I was advised by the former minister for Comm Games delivery, Ms Allan, that advice was being sought to consider cancellation of the games in light of those cost pressures.

**The CHAIR:** But the presentation at PAEC was very positive – 'It's all going to plan, and the games is going to be wonderful.' So what happened in those few days?

**Harriet SHING:** Well, my objective was, in the course of the work that I did as Commonwealth Games legacy minister, to deliver on the legacy and to deliver on those outcomes that I outlined in my opening remarks – to deliver on that prosperity and that opportunity and that livability for regional Victoria. The basis for the Commonwealth Games coming to Victoria, and this is very clearly a matter of public record, was to deliver a games for regional Victoria and within regional Victoria. That was the rationale for proceeding with the Commonwealth Games in 2026, and that was about that multilocation delivery and –

**The CHAIR:** Which turned out to be not feasible at those costs?

**Harriet SHING:** Well, at those costs – and again when you look at the costs associated with transportation, with security and the obligations around scope that sat within the host contract, they were constantly the subject of analysis and of discussion, and I think there were other departments involved also in the analysis of what those cost pressures looked like.

**The CHAIR:** Something must have happened between the present – assuming that there were no discussions happening before PAEC, there must have been some sort of discussion that happened in that intervening period when you started having the discussion about, 'Okay, well, this might be a possibility that we cancel it.'

**Harriet SHING:** Well, I can assure you, Chair, that there were no discussions that I was part of prior to PAEC. There were no discussions that I was part of prior to 22 June.

**The CHAIR:** But something happened after that, potentially.

**Harriet SHING:** So on 22 June I was advised by Ms Allan, the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery, that cancellation of the games was under consideration as a result of those cost pressures that had been identified, and those cost pressures had been part of conversations and discussions in my work, as legacy. But as I said, my work as legacy minister was to deliver on those outcomes and to get the best benefit possible for rural and regional Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Shing. Mr McCracken.

**Joe McCracken:** Thank you, Minister Shing. I have got a few questions, so I will just fire through them as quickly as I can.

**Harriet SHING:** Yes, sure.

**Joe McCracken:** In preparation for today's hearing, have you spoken with the Premier, the former Premier, any other minister, the department or anyone from their offices?

**Harriet SHING:** I have had a conversation about executive privilege with counsel from the Premier's office. Other than that, no.

**Joe McCracken:** Okay. So no-one from the Premier's private office, including former staff, about the Comm Games at any point after you agreed to appear here today?

**Harriet Shing:** No.

**Joe McCracken:** Okay. None at all?

**Harriet Shing:** No.

**Joe McCracken:** Okay. Thank you. Have you had any conversations, text messages, WhatsApp exchanges or anything like that with Premier Allan about her refusal to appear today?

**Harriet Shing:** No.

**Joe McCracken:** You are sure – none at all?

**Harriet Shing:** Well, the Premier has been on the public record. I have stood with the Premier at a public event where she was asked by somebody else and answered a question put by somebody else. It is a matter for the Premier, and she has made her position on that clear.

**Joe McCracken:** I just do not know what she is hiding on this, that is all, and I thought you might have had some conversations about that.

**Harriet Shing:** Well, that is a matter for you, Mr McCracken, to comment on that or to have opinions on that. Again I would invite you to direct me to the questions that you have got for me on the basis that I have steadfastly said to you in the Parliament and in response to questions publicly that I am really happy to answer questions. For the sake of completeness and for the record, you will note that after the Commonwealth Games legacy portfolio ceased to be a portfolio, I went to considerable length in the Parliament, notwithstanding that the portfolio no longer existed, to apply questions and answers to the regional development portfolio, which I still had. I have attempted to provide information in response to questions from, I think, all members of your team, Mr McCracken, about the delivery of the package as it relates to legacy.

**Joe McCracken:** Thank you. When did you find out that lawyers had been engaged to provide advice on the cancellation of the Comm Games?

**Harriet Shing:** 22 June.

**Joe McCracken:** 22 June. We know that Premier Andrews was aware, Minister Allan was aware, the Secretary of DPC, the Premier's private office – they were all aware on 14 June that Arnold Bloch Leibler had been called. But you are saying that you did not know until the 22nd.

**Harriet Shing:** Yes. I did not know until I met with Minister Allan on 22 June, and she advised me that cancellation was being considered as an option in light of cost pressures.

**Joe McCracken:** Why were you kept out of the loop?

**Harriet Shing:** Why was I notified on 22 June? That is a matter for others. I can speak to the fact that I was notified on 22 June, but I am not in a position to presuppose any other conclusions about why that happened then.

**The Chair:** Others have refused to appear, I might add.

**Joe McCracken:** It just seems that everyone else knew –

**Harriet Shing:** Well, it is an upper house inquiry, Mr Limbrick. There are joint select committee processes. If you want to have a discussion across the entire Parliament, there is clear precedent for that.

**Joe McCracken:** It just appears that everyone else knew but you at that point in time, until over a week later, which seems strange. Secretary of DJSIR Tim Ada's testimony to the committee was that the department was told on 19 June that lawyers had been brought in for potential cancellation. Your departmental secretary did not tell you either?

**Harriet SHING:** No. DJSIR?

**Joe McCracken:** Your departmental secretary did not tell you?

**Harriet SHING:** So – no.

**Joe McCracken:** Why?

**David Davis:** It is just not credible.

**Harriet SHING:** Mr Davis, you can make whatever commentary you want. I am giving evidence to this committee that on 22 June I was advised by Minister Allan –

**David Davis:** Well, I will tell you I do not believe you, but you can make from that as you will. I do not believe you. It is not credible.

**The CHAIR:** Please, Mr McCracken, just continue.

**Joe McCracken:** Thank you. On 20 June 2023 you told the house, and I will quote you here:

The previous budget contains a \$2.6 billion investment, which is about making sure that we deliver the games of a lifetime.

**Harriet SHING:** Yes.

**Joe McCracken:** When you said that, did you know either by formal or informal channels that lawyers had been engaged at all?

**Harriet SHING:** No.

**Joe McCracken:** So multiple witnesses –

**Harriet SHING:** I do not mislead the Parliament, Mr McCracken; I take my obligations and responsibilities really seriously. And in this committee here, for avoidance of any doubt, I was advised on 22 June by Minister Allan that cancellation of the games was under consideration in light of increasing cost pressures.

**Joe McCracken:** Well, we have been told in here from a number of different testimonies that even on 4 April there was advice to government that the games could not be delivered for \$2.6 billion and that you have been regularly briefed on this. Is that not the case?

**Harriet SHING:** So that is a different question, Mr McCracken, that you are now asking me.

**David Davis:** Closely related, though.

**Harriet SHING:** Well, if we are going to have questions with commentary, then it might be difficult for me to provide assistance to the committee.

**Joe McCracken:** I am just asking on the point that we have had testimony say that you have been briefed on the cost pressures and you –

**Harriet SHING:** Cost pressures were an ongoing part of discussions around how to deliver the games. The work that I had in the legacy portfolio was directed solely to ensuring that those legacy benefits could be realised, and that work was underpinned by the \$2.6 billion in the 2022–23 budget.

**Joe McCracken:** Well, I am not sure – if you knew there were cost pressures, how did you think you could deliver all the legacy benefits?

**Harriet SHING:** Because you work to extract the best value you possibly can. That is the nature of project delivery. That is the work that governments do.

**Joe McCracken:** But weren't there any conversations about the fact that you had all these mounting cost pressures from as early as, say, April, but you were still working to that \$2.6 billion budget that you thought

you could deliver everything on? Wasn't there anything at all where you thought, 'Oh, we might have to make a change'?

**Harriet SHING:** I was charged with the responsibility of delivering those legacy outcomes. Again, the question of change was a constant feature of the work that we were doing.

**David DAVIS:** Sounds like an episode of *The Games*. Are you going to deliver a short pool or something? Is that what you are going to do?

**The CHAIR:** Without commentary, please, Mr Davis.

**Harriet SHING:** Again, let us make a distinction between delivery and what that infrastructure looks like – to your point, Mr Davis –

**David DAVIS:** The legacy of it.

**Harriet SHING:** and legacy, which I have just taken you through in some detail around the work that I was charged with. My responsibilities are pretty clear. I hope you will go back to that work as it related to my former portfolio, and that might give you some further clarity around the work that I was doing.

**Joe McCracken:** On 21 June you told the Legislative Council, and I will quote again:

... Victoria 2026 will enable our regions, our regional hubs and our rural communities to shine on the world stage.

You also said you were:

... looking forward to continuing the engagements with local councils, with the Commonwealth Games Federation, with community sporting facilities and with everybody who is working so hard to develop the momentum that will really enable these games to shine ...

So again, just for the record, you had no idea that lawyers had been engaged at that point in time to enable the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games?

**Harriet SHING:** I was advised on 22 June by Minister Allan, again, that cancellation was being considered.

**David DAVIS:** But you knew the games were undeliverable. The costs had blown out and you were not going to deliver a shining games, you were going to deliver a games that had been cut short.

**Harriet SHING:** Again, to the point that you have just asked, Mr McCracken, that engagement continued immediately after announcement of that regional package, and, again, in my opening remarks I have taken you through the further meetings, the events, the forums and the discussions that continued right up until I finished my work as regional development minister.

**Joe McCracken:** I just find it unbelievable that you did not know.

**Harriet SHING:** That is a matter for you, Mr McCracken. I stand by my evidence, and I stand by what occurred.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr McCracken. Mr Galea.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for joining us today, Minister.

**Harriet SHING:** Thanks.

**Michael GALEA:** In relation specifically to your portfolio that you held as the Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, you outlined in your opening remarks – I think it was six legacy pillars that you specifically looked after. I am wondering if you can outline the clear distinction, I guess, of what your responsibilities were under the legacy portfolio.

**Harriet SHING:** Sure. So the legacy portfolio itself related to those themes of the pillars, as they informed the work that I was charged to do. Again, there is a pretty clear distinction between delivery on the one hand and legacy on the other, but the pillars sat over and above all of that work. They were really geared toward delivering on that values framework, and that was a clear part of the discussions with the Commonwealth

Games Federation, with Commonwealth Games Australia and also with the government around delivery of those regional benefits. So the lens through which that applied was very squarely underpinned by First Nations, by accessibility and inclusion and by economic legacy, social legacy, environmental legacy and sport and wellbeing legacy. In all of the conversations and discussions that I had – whether individually with organisations, with mayors, with CEOs, with heads of sporting organisations, with people from tourism organisations or with people from the social and community services sector – those discussions were informed by legacy and by legacy pillars. It was also then about making sure that the way in which we engaged as government and the way in which the OC and the OCG engaged with community was through the lens of achieving those outcomes, because the rationale for delivering a regional games was always intended to confer benefit upon as many groups and as many parts of rural and regional communities as possible for the long-term benefit that was a driving force behind that bid and behind the contract.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. And you mentioned – I think the first legacy pillar was accessibility and inclusion.

**Harriet SHING:** That was the second one. First Peoples was the first, yes. Thanks.

**Michael GALEA:** Apologies – the second one. And with the initiatives, with regard to whether it was infrastructure or services or other events that you had a purview of, how did accessibility and inclusion factor in with those policy areas?

**Harriet SHING:** One of the things that I heard very clearly when I was attending and hosting the regional engagement forums and then, after the package was delivered, those round tables, was that accessibility and inclusion is a really significant area of limitation for people to participate in community life, whether that is being part of sporting teams and clubs or even spectating, whether that is being able to access changing facilities or whether that is being able to participate in a cultural program or a festival. We know that across the state, where those limitations and where those obstacles can be removed, we see enormous benefit for the participation, the wellbeing and, again, the dignity of people living with disability – not just physical disability, not just visible disability but all sorts of adjustments that might need to be made to improve inclusion – and that was a really clear focus of the conversations that we had. Immediately after the package was announced on 18 July, those round tables continued. So I did not skip a beat – went straight into those conversations. I think I was actually in Ballarat – your area, Mr McCracken – on the Thursday of the announcement of the package, and that was in fact directly a discussion within which accessibility and inclusion were part.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. Related to that of course is the social procurement area of this, and we spoke with your predecessor in the role Shaun Leane just before, as you are probably aware. In particular during your time as minister, how did the social procurement package assist and what were you focusing on in that area? The President talked about women aged 45 years and older as one example. What were some of the priorities in that space, and how did that work inform what you were doing in the department at the time?

**Harriet SHING:** One of the things that has driven the work that we have pursued as a government since 2014 has been social procurement. It has been about social enterprise, it has been about opportunities for people to participate in the paid workforce. On that basis there have been a range of programs that have leaned into that, and this was no exception to those priorities, sitting very squarely within the work of large-scale packages and delivery of outcomes. In the discussions that I had across rural and regional communities, which, again, included people from well beyond those host locations, right out to the edges of the state, the importance of inclusion, social enterprise and good procurement practices was a really significant feature. From access to training and skills – those partnerships and the opportunities for consortia between those smaller social enterprise organisations – right through to partnering with large organisations, the work on apprenticeships and training and the way in which skills in in-demand sectors could be deployed for the purpose of delivering on the Commonwealth Games legacy, that was a constant feature of the work that we did. I heard it loud and clear, and it has actually been incorporated into the regional package and that \$2 billion that was announced on 18 July.

**Michael GALEA:** You mentioned that this has been a recurring theme of the Andrews and now Allan government, and we heard this morning in relation to in particular the Level Crossing Removal Project that social procurement played a major role from the outset of that as well. That history of the government having

that emphasis on social procurement at the front of these projects, not just as an afterthought – did that really lay the groundwork for the work that you did in that space?

**Harriet SHING:** It has been a defining feature of the idea of opportunity for all Victorians. Again, when we look at the other pillars and we look at the regional package and what that is geared towards achieving, it is about that long-term opportunity and prosperity, but inclusion is right at the heart of that. Whether it is for people in particular circumstances or locations, whether it is particular members of our communities, our First Nations communities, the work that we want to do and want to achieve in the regional package is as germane to those values that have underpinned everything we have done as anything else, including those large-scale infrastructure projects that you have talked about.

**Michael GALEA:** And you touched as well on how that has progressed into the regional package. Noting that you were for a period the Minister for Regional Development, even at the time that there was a Commonwealth Games legacy portfolio, and that you still had some oversight as the regional development minister that continued through in that time as well, did any particular parts of that come up?

**Harriet SHING:** Yes. There were, as I said, ongoing conversations. They happened online, they happened in person. I went to as many parts of the state as I possibly could to hear from people about the things that were of most pressing priority and need but also about opportunities for growth into the future, and that was at the core of this work. The participation in those discussions was significant. We had large numbers of people attending those regional package forums, and that has been a really important part of shaping the way in which the regional package will be delivered – at least it certainly was when I held the portfolio of regional development minister.

**Michael GALEA:** Sure, thank you. Just lastly, back to those six legacy pillars, I am assuming they remained part of the regional package as well in your work as regional development minister.

**Harriet SHING:** Yes, that is right.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Galea. Mr Davis.

**David DAVIS:** Minister, thank you for appearing. We heard your contribution at PAEC and your contribution in the Parliament, and as I understand it what you are saying is that you were advised on 22 June that the cancellation of the games was under consideration.

**Harriet SHING:** Yes.

**David DAVIS:** And you expect us to believe that Daniel Andrews knew, Jacinta Allan knew, the Secretary of DPC knew, the Secretary of DJSIR knew and Daniel Andrews's private office knew the cancellation was on the cards by 19 June but you as minister responsible and the partner of Daniel Andrews's chief of staff Lissie Ratcliff did not know. You knew nothing.

**Harriet SHING:** Mr Davis, I have given my answer to this question, and I have got to say that –

**David DAVIS:** It is just not credible. You have got to be reasonable and be honest with us.

**Harriet SHING:** I am getting a bit sick and tired of the constant inference of impropriety in relation to me and the way in which I undertake my work.

**David DAVIS:** That is because it is not credible. That is why.

**Harriet SHING:** My relationship has been a matter of public record for years. It has been a matter of utmost importance to me in the context of conflict management frameworks that I have not, as a matter of practice in relation to any of the portfolios that I have held, had dealings with the former Premier's former chief of staff.

**David DAVIS:** Daniel Andrews, Jacinta Allan, the secretaries – your secretary did not tell you?

**Harriet SHING:** Mr Davis, if you have got an allegation, then put it.

**David DAVIS:** My allegation is simply that you are not being direct and honest with the committee, and the Secretary of DJSIR I do not believe did not tell you. I think they knew, and the idea that the secretary of your department would not tell you that the games that you were managing, that you were one of the key ministers for, was about to be cancelled is just not credible. It is cloud-cuckoo-land stuff.

**Harriet SHING:** Mr Davis, I want to be really careful that you do not verbal me here. On 22 June I was advised that cancellation was under consideration. There was not a decision taken to cancel the games until 17 July.

**David DAVIS:** All hunky-dory. You have got the lawyers brought in and you are not told, even though you are one of the two ministers that are responsible for the games. It is nonsense. I do not believe you, and I am putting on record I do not believe you. But we will move on.

**Harriet SHING:** Thanks, Mr Davis. Again, in relation to any other matter that you might wish to raise about conflict management and the insinuations of impropriety that you are making –

**David DAVIS:** I just do not believe your secretary did not make –

**Harriet SHING:** Mr Davis, if you have got an insinuation or an allegation about that particular part of the preambles to your questions, then put that.

**David DAVIS:** I do not believe your secretary did not tell you. I do not believe that you were not told. I believe that you knew.

**Harriet SHING:** My evidence is my evidence, Mr Davis, and I stand by it.

**David DAVIS:** Well, no-one believes you. The Office of the Commonwealth Games testified to the parliamentary committee that it and DJSIR provided regular fortnightly briefings from April 2023 onwards, and that included details of budget blowouts. Mr Garner told the parliamentary committee:

Later Minister Shing, when she was appointed, was there. They varied – sometimes Minister Allan was not there and Minister Shing was there, sometimes they were both there and sometimes it was just Minister Shing.

What are the dates that you were briefed on? Can you provide that list?

**Harriet SHING:** Let me take that on notice in terms of those meetings. Again, for the sake of assisting you, Mr Davis, there were meetings I think on a regular or semiregular basis with Minister Allan and I, and then later in the piece there were alternating weeks. They occurred on about a fortnightly basis, and then later there were meetings every other week that I attended on legacy work only.

**David DAVIS:** We have got the evidence of Mr Garner that he briefed you and Minister Shing –

**Harriet SHING:** I am Minister Shing, Mr Davis.

**David DAVIS:** and Minister Allan, rather – regularly, roughly fortnightly. You have not come prepared with that, but can you find those dates for us?

**Harriet SHING:** I have just given you my answer, Mr Davis.

**David DAVIS:** You have not given us the dates. We would like to see the dates.

**Harriet SHING:** You just asked me if I could take that on notice and I have said that I will, so I am not sure what else you are after.

**David DAVIS:** Let me ask: when were you first briefed that there were significant budget blowouts?

**Harriet SHING:** They were not budget blowouts; they were escalating cost pressures, Mr Davis.

**David DAVIS:** Oh, they were not budget blowouts. We have gone from \$2.6 billion, up another billion or so, and then ultimately we go up to \$7 billion. You are saying they are not blowouts.

**Harriet SHING:** The budget that I was working to, Mr Davis, was the \$2.6 billion that was budgeted for.

**David DAVIS:** But you knew that was under pressure.

**Harriet SHING:** There were cost pressures.

**David DAVIS:** Yes, real pressures and blowouts, I would put to you.

**Harriet SHING:** You can put whatever you want, Mr Davis.

**David DAVIS:** But you will not use the ‘blowout’ word, will you?

**Harriet SHING:** The budget was the budget was the budget, \$2.6 billion. My work as –

**David DAVIS:** And you had written correspondence from the OC, you had briefings from –

**Harriet SHING:** From the OC?

**David DAVIS:** Yes, to Minister Allan and to the department –

**Harriet SHING:** Sorry, to Minister Allan. All right, I am just going to interrupt you there, because you have done this in the chamber before. You have actually tried to attribute quotes to me that were not issued by me; they were from Ms Allan.

**David DAVIS:** Well, that is nonsense.

**Harriet SHING:** You have now tried to attribute receipt of a letter to me which was not sent to me.

**David DAVIS:** No, no, to the department.

**Harriet SHING:** Again, Mr Davis, I really need for you to be clear here, because you are inviting conclusions that are based on falsehoods.

**David DAVIS:** What, that the department and you knew about the cost blowouts in April at a minimum? You knew in April there were huge cost blowouts.

**Harriet SHING:** There were cost pressures.

**David DAVIS:** There were huge cost blowouts.

**Harriet SHING:** That is not a matter of controversy.

**David DAVIS:** Actually it is, because you did not act on them at that time. You did not deal with these cost pressures and cost blowouts.

**Harriet SHING:** The action in response to the cost pressures, Mr Davis, was realised on 17 July when government determined by way of cabinet decision not to proceed with the games.

**David DAVIS:** You continued to mislead the Parliament and PAEC, saying it was all hunky-dory, steaming ahead at \$2.6 billion, and you knew that figure was nonsense – was bullshit, actually.

**The CHAIR:** That is –

**David DAVIS:** I withdraw that – nonsense.

**Harriet SHING:** Mr Davis, let us just be really clear. I stand by the answers that I have given in the Parliament. I stand by the answers and the evidence that I have given to this inquiry.

**David DAVIS:** It was nonsense. What actions did you take to assure yourself that updated figures were robust?

**Harriet SHING:** What do you mean by ‘updated figures were robust’?

**David DAVIS:** The figures that were coming through. We know that there was a new bid that was being prepared for additional money, for example. Were you aware of that bid?

**Harriet SHING:** There were requests for additional funding. Those requests were ultimately unsuccessful.

**David DAVIS:** Were you aware of those and the cabinet submission that was prepared?

**Harriet SHING:** I am not going to talk to matters in relation to cabinet submissions, Mr Davis.

**David DAVIS:** Were you aware of attempts to deal with these huge cost blowouts?

**Harriet SHING:** I was aware that the department had concerns around cost pressures, and again that is not a matter of new information in that regard.

**David DAVIS:** What actions did you take?

**Harriet SHING:** To understand what those cost pressures looked like?

**David DAVIS:** To deal with them.

**Harriet SHING:** Again, to work out as much delivery as was possible within the \$2.6 billion budget. Again, Mr Davis, that \$2.6 billion was never at risk, because it was budgeted for in the 2022–23 budget. It was there.

**David DAVIS:** But you knew it was not deliverable at that rate, and you knew that as early as April. You knew it was not deliverable at \$2.6 billion.

**Harriet SHING:** My role was to deliver legacy. In fact that was squarely within the \$2.6 billion allocation.

**David DAVIS:** It was not, and you know it was not. In any event, let us move on.

**Harriet SHING:** I do not know why you are asking me questions, Mr Davis, if your entire foundation is not to actually accept anything that I am saying.

**David DAVIS:** I just do not believe you. It has got to be credible.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Davis. Ms Ermacora.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Thank you, Chair. And thank you for being here today, Minister.

**Harriet SHING:** Thank you.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** I want to move on to the community consultation topic.

**Harriet SHING:** Yes, I thought we would never get there in terms of the actual terms of reference for this particular inquiry, but here we are.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Could you provide some details around the community consultation undertaken with regional communities, businesses and councils in your previous capacity as the minister for Comm Games legacy?

**Harriet SHING:** Sure. As I have said in my opening remarks, there were numerous events and consultations and discussions. There was an overlap between my work as regional development minister and Commonwealth Games legacy minister simply by virtue of the fact that it was a regional cities model. So on that basis and given the number of times that I was out and about around the state that was a constant feature of discussion. One of the key components of discussion around regional development and regional growth was about making sure that there were economic and social and community-based opportunities into the future, and therefore the legacy work sat very squarely in that same space.

In the course of those months in which I held both portfolios there were, as I have said, those numerous conversations and events at Bendigo, Traralgon, Shepparton, Geelong and Ballarat, but they were not the only meetings by any stretch of the imagination. They were the large meetings, which were part of a series of

presentations but then also very detailed question-and-answer sessions, and further, after that part of the event had concluded, numerous conversations and discussions within which I asked people to contribute their suggestions and their views so that that discussion could continue. Then after the regional package was announced there were dates that had already been established for legacy round tables and for follow-up. They went directly into the work of the regional package, and that work continued. There were many of the same attendees at those large events but also a number of new attendees, and I continued, again, with that much smaller level of engagement, including with councils and community and sporting and other organisations.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** What was some of the feedback that you received in those consultations?

**Harriet SHING:** One of the key areas of priority that was identified was the need for housing, and that came out very clearly in every regional engagement forum that I was part of. It also came out in all of the regional package forums that occurred after the announcement of the \$2 billion package itself. That work and those contributions directly informed the content of the regional package. It was about addressing, again within those pillars that I spoke to Mr Galea about, those benefits for rural and regional communities and again taking those beyond the host locations. That was made very clear in the course of those forums and round tables – that it was about other shires, that it was about taking conversations and discussions of that investment right out to the borders of the state; one such example being ongoing discussions I had with Mildura city council and representatives from that particular team about what was needed. Worker accommodation was a big part of the priorities that were identified as much as anything, because we have, as I said, this really low unemployment rate, but it is very hard for people to come to regional areas to fill, say, early childhood educator roles or healthcare worker roles if you cannot find rental accommodation or indeed there is a shortage across any sort of housing market.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Very good. With the legacy, the regional package, did you do consultation as well for the regional package?

**Harriet SHING:** Yes. That was when we pivoted directly into that work, so the dates stayed in the diary. The Thursday of the announcement, following the regional package being announced on the Wednesday, I went to Ballarat. I met with Ballarat City Council, other councils and organisations. I believe that there were local tourism operators there. I met with First Nations representatives to talk about the impact of the decision, to talk about the impact of the regional package, and where to from here. Again, it was a series of really important conversations in the weeks following the announcement of the package. It was not an easy decision for many people across rural and regional Victoria to accept, because there was a level of enthusiasm around delivery of the games. People recognised that the cost, as it had been modelled to be in reference to those cost pressures and the increases, meant that it did not stack up. It did not mean that people were not disappointed. The work then became about moving into that regional package and about making it clear that the contributions that had been made in those forums, in those discussions, had been worked directly into that package, and we are seeing that now in the way in which the package has been set out and the way in which it is intended to deliver those long-term benefits.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Thank you. I want to go on to First Nations engagement. In particular, what engagement and feedback did you receive on those topics from First Nations people?

**Harriet SHING:** So firstly, the First Nations engagement and the leadership group that had been part of the legacy portfolio did a power of work. That had brought together representatives from First Nations communities all over Victoria, and that was part of a really important series of conversations around the impact of a Commonwealth Games coming to regional Victoria and how to make sure that First Nations identity, visibility and engagement were a part of that, not just in the tangible but also in the intangible. So when the decision was announced, when the package was announced, there were a series of conversations that I had and meetings that I had with First Nations communities and representatives in which they expressed a significant degree of frustration, of anger, of disappointment, of grief around the work that had been put in and then, subsequently, a desire to continue the work of that engagement to develop economic opportunities, social opportunities and cultural opportunities but those tangible opportunities as well. And in discussing the regional package and the regional development investments – until I stopped having those portfolios – it was about making sure that from Gunnai/Kurnai to Dja Dja Wurrung to Wadawurrung and right to the borders of the state First Nations priorities and self-determination were at the heart of the work from here.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Very good. In terms of the integration, you were describing the integration almost between the pillars for the First Nations people. Would you say that is something that is also going to continue?

**Harriet SHING:** Yes. There is always an overlap between the concepts and the values that underpinned all of the work of legacy. Those pillars are about making sure that there is capacity for people to participate in community, that there are opportunities for economic growth, that there are opportunities for sustainability and for the way in which we engage with the oldest continuous culture on earth and the way in which we develop facilities that provide connections, such as those community and sporting facilities, but also – and again to come back to the tiny towns – the additional \$10 million for the tiny towns program was, as I described this in the series of regional forums and round tables, not dissimilar to an opportunity to harness civic pride in the way that the baton relay had been intended to wend its way through rural and regional Victoria. We want to celebrate those places of up to 5000 people, and the way to do that is with those grants of between \$5000 and \$50,000, and that is reflected in the regional package because that is what people said was important to them.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Ermacora. Dr Mansfield.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you. And thank you, Minister Shing, for appearing. I am keen to ask some questions about housing. In particular I want to understand what your role was in oversight of the housing aspect of the games. I know you have talked about it being part of legacy, but what exactly was your role?

**Harriet SHING:** Sure. Within the split of Commonwealth Games delivery and Commonwealth Games legacy, there was a workforce and spectator accommodation piece that sat within legacy. The other components of village development sat within Commonwealth Games delivery, so again, there is a demarcation there. When the regional package was announced, that includes, as you would know, \$1 billion for at least 1300 social and affordable homes across rural and regional Victoria, and that does not just go to those hub locations, it is across the entire state, but also that \$150 million worker accommodation fund. So that then came squarely within the remit of housing for that \$1 billion fund and regional development for that workforce accommodation fund – if that helps.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** So in terms of the housing legacy, before the announcement of the extra packages, was the social and affordable housing component – because that was talked up as one of the big legacies of the village accommodation – something you had oversight of?

**Harriet SHING:** Minister Brooks was the housing minister at the time, so that was part of conversations with Homes Victoria around the way in which the development of those sites after the games could occur. So again –

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** That was not under your responsibility, that aspect of the legacy?

**Harriet SHING:** Within the Commonwealth Games legacy, no. The villages and the village accommodation sat within Commonwealth Games delivery, and then after the games that was about engagement with the housing portfolio. The challenge here, and it is somewhat complicated by the fact that I now hold housing –

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Sorry, I still do not understand what part was the legacy part of housing.

**Harriet SHING:** Worker and spectator accommodation, not the village sites themselves.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Okay. All right. So at any point did you meet with Homes Victoria?

**Harriet SHING:** The department was meeting with Homes Victoria. They provided me with information. It was a different department, so it was appropriate that DJSIR and representatives from the OC were providing me with that information.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Okay. Because I guess, again, one of the legacy aspects that was talked about was this 20 to 30 per cent social and affordable housing. Was it your understanding that that was to be in addition to the \$1.3 billion of the Big Housing Build that had already been allocated for regional areas – so there was the \$5.3 billion, and \$1.3 billion was set to be going to rural and regional areas?

**Harriet SHING:** \$1.25 billion, yes.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Yes, going to those areas. Was the 20 to 30 per cent in the villages in addition to that? Was that your understanding?

**Harriet SHING:** Can I take that on notice, just because, again, if it relates to village accommodation, that is something that sits – again, I will take it on notice. I am trying to assist the committee as housing minister now. So that then relates to part of the terms of reference. But again, if I can take it on notice in that context, that might be of assistance to you.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Okay. I guess given your previous answers you possibly did not have oversight over this, but the advice we have had to this committee is that the site for villages and games housing in Ballarat was only suitable for temporary housing. So what was the legacy going to be for Ballarat in terms of housing?

**Harriet SHING:** So Ballarat – I had numerous conversations with council and with communities in the lead-up to the delivery of the legacy process and procurement but then after the announcement of the regional package, and the decontamination and remediation of that site were things that the EPA was working through. It was about geotech works, and it was also about the way in which the site could be prepared. So I was having pretty constant conversations about the progress of that. It was also then about understanding the overlay of the caveat at the time on use of that land. That caveat was removed, I think, in the week of the announcement of the regional package, and now that further work is continuing. Temporary housing would always have to be located on areas that were up to standard.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Of course. But I guess the whole point was that there was going to be some legacy housing and that this, if it was temporary housing, would not have left a legacy – it would have been two-week housing. So I guess where was the –

**Harriet SHING:** Sorry, did you say ‘two-week housing’?

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** That is what we were told: that it would be suitable for people to stay in for a couple of weeks, but –

**Harriet SHING:** But it would remain there until such time as it was either improved, retrofitted or relocated elsewhere.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Okay. At PAEC on 8 June you provided information about the village sites. You said that pre-work, preconstruction and planning work, was underway. The games were cancelled several weeks later. Do we know how much was spent on that work?

**Harriet SHING:** I do not.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** That is okay.

**Harriet SHING:** It is part of the ongoing work, though, because it has now transitioned into that housing piece.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** So is that preplanning work at those sites that had been identified – I mean, presumably it related to the sites that had been identified –

**Harriet SHING:** Again, I am not trying to complicate things. That sits within delivery, but it now sits within the housing piece and discussions with Minister Brooks, who was housing minister and who is now doing the precincts work. So why don't I see what I can find out for you on that?

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Okay. That would be great to find out. Are we starting from scratch or are we building on that work that was done?

**Harriet SHING:** No, the idea is that we build on the work that has been done. And again, we want the work that has been put into legacy to be deployed to the best extent possible in all of the regional package.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** And of the 1300 homes that are to be delivered to regional areas, do you know what proportion is going to be in those original host sites?

**Harriet SHING:** It is at least 1300. Again I want to get the best bang for our buck, and there are a range of configurations that are available to us there.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** So do you know how much will be delivered in those original host cities?

**Harriet SHING:** No, we are working through that. Again, host cities in those engagement forums have been really clear about the need for social and affordable housing. It is a different profile depending on where you go, though. In Morwell there is a very different profile to Geelong, and the list goes on of examples. We are working through that, including with councils, and Homes Vic is part of those conversations and driving that work as part of their business as usual, with the addition of that extra \$1 billion.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** And in terms of the legacy for other infrastructure, one of the things we have heard about – a point of contention – has been the location of the pool in the Geelong area and the legacy that that might leave. I think there was some local push for Kardinia pool to be upgraded, and Swimming Victoria thought that might be a good idea, but the location of Armstrong Creek was chosen. It would be some temporary infrastructure and then something left at the end. To your knowledge, what analysis or business case went into deciding that location and that particular way of delivering a pool and the legacy for the community?

**Harriet SHING:** So the legacy is separate. Again, I think I gave evidence at PAEC that there has been a relocation of pools. The FINA pool was split in half, for example, and relocated to Waurn Ponds and Sunshine. So it was about what would happen after the games; that is where the permanent sporting infrastructure and upgraded sporting infrastructure are part of that.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** But what analysis went into deciding what would be left at the end and why it was needed in that particular location?

**Harriet SHING:** There was a combination of temporary overlays, and that was very much sitting within the delivery space: how did we scale up the facilities in order to deliver those large-scale events?

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I guess what I am trying to get at is: was there a needs analysis done where you looked at, ‘Okay, looking across this region, there is a particular need for a pool in this location for this community to meet the needs of learn to swim’ – was there an analysis that was done to inform what legacy that infrastructure would leave for that community long term?

**Harriet SHING:** The delivery of the games was the founding process by which those discussions on legacy then emerged. It was about the temporary overlay and what could be delivered to host the games and then deploying, for the best-value proposition, that infrastructure elsewhere and/or improving or upgrading it. Again, it is an interface between the permanent legacy items on the one hand, which are being delivered through that \$550 million, and the temporary overlay that was necessarily required to deliver the games to the scale and in accordance with the scope of the contract with the CGF.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Dr Mansfield. Mr McIntosh.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Morning, Minister. Thanks for joining. You and I are both members for regional Victoria, and we are actually in fact both Eastern Victoria Region –

**Harriet SHING:** Yes – Ms Bath as well.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Yes, we have strong representation here. I am sure you are the same – I am incredibly proud this government has throughout its duration invested in regional and rural Victoria, whether that is infrastructure, services or community, and I think that philosophy was really shown with the intention behind the Commonwealth Games. I think we have heard on this committee the excitement around the regional package and all of the investments that it is going to make across so many areas, across all of rural and regional Victoria, and the opportunities right across the board. I just wonder – you went through the areas of investment in your initial contribution, but I just wanted to dive into detail on a number of those. I do want to start with housing particularly, given your portfolio. Could you talk to us about the benefits for regional and rural Victorians that will come collectively for the state? Perhaps start with housing.

**Harriet SHING:** Sure. Thank you, Mr McIntosh. Again, this sits across a couple of portfolios, and it also builds on the work of the Big Housing Build. So starting from that end, there has been a \$5.3 billion investment

in additional housing – social and affordable housing – across the state. On top of that there is the \$1 billion Big Housing Build within the regional package, so that is to deliver at least 1300 additional social and affordable homes across rural and regional Victoria. That is also added to by the \$150 million worker accommodation package. We know, as I have indicated in answers to I think Ms Ermacora, that housing is one of the most pressing priorities for rural and regional communities. That population growth in Melbourne, but to the ends related to this inquiry and to my portfolio in housing as it relates to this part of the package also in rural and regional Victoria, has a significant impact as a set of obstructions where, for example, in peak summer periods people cannot get workers in those very busy tourism destinations because there is no housing. It means that in other parts of the state people cannot get aged-care workers or healthcare workers, which then has an impact on people being able to age or live in place. That is why, again, this part of the package is so important, because in delivering at least 1300 additional social and affordable homes across rural and regional Victoria, we can address those shortages. We can also make sure that they go where they need to go and that they are developed as dwellings in the configurations that are needed.

If you look at the housing statement, it is consistent with meeting the objectives of population growth but also the importance of providing housing stock and bringing it online in a way that is fit for purpose in the long term. It might well be single-bedroom units. It might well be family accommodation. It is about, though, making sure that people have a roof over their heads in the locations that they want. We rely upon data from the housing register. Homes Victoria has a lot of information about where and how that housing can be delivered, and there is a power of work that has also gone into providing housing in those in-need areas – that might be Colac, it might be Wodonga or it might be Shepparton – to provide a measure of pressure release for those needs, including in and around those flood-affected areas from October last year. That is part of the business as usual, though, of Homes Victoria. Development Vic is also working alongside the affordability partnership within the housing statement, and this is about making sure that we bring all sectors together to improve the volume and the delivery of housing stock around the state – 80,000 new homes per year for the next 10 years is something that we have committed to, and this is a part of that work and that business as usual goes on.

**Tom McINTOSH:** To deliver this work – and I touched on this earlier this morning. I grew up in the regions in the 90s under a Kennett government where train lines were basically shut down and community services were ripped out. We saw small farms consolidated into corporates – we lost a lot of small farms – houses left to rot and schools closed. Sports communities just – the footy clubs just closed, they just ceased to exist. In conversations I have there are conversations about getting workers to work in regional Victoria, which was very different in that sort of decade following that era of disinvestment. You know, working in a trade, we had to move. We had to go to the cities to work, basically. Whereas now we have got the other problem. We have got people wanting to work in place in the regions, and indeed people coming to the regions to do work. So I am just wondering if you can talk about the worker accommodation and how we are going to support that work to be delivered to make that investment.

**Harriet SHING:** That work sits within Regional Development Victoria, and it builds directly off the feedback received, as I indicated in earlier answers, in the course of those regional engagement forums and those regional package events. So it is administered under DJSIR. That now sits with Minister Gayle Tierney, but in the work that I did prior to leaving that portfolio, it was about making sure that in developing guidelines they were to address areas of greatest need and it was about building on work that has already happened.

As you may be aware, there has been a change whereby planning approval is not required to have up to 10 dwellings for the purpose of agricultural land to assist with harvest. That is actually something that has taken a bit of pressure off the worker accommodation market. There is also a range of other pilots – the Ararat workforce pilot, work to develop and deliver worker accommodation up in Robinvale. These are the sorts of things that are happening all around the state, and this fund of \$150 million is intended to augment that.

But we need to take pressure off the housing market in every way we can, and that requires partnerships with the private sector and requires work alongside community housing providers. It is about public housing, and it is also about making sure that we have the amenity and we have the planning frameworks in place, including through those partnerships with local councils, to expedite the work of bringing those homes online but also to make sure that they are fit for purpose, because if we want to deliver housing stock, it needs to be delivered where it is needed and in the configurations where it is going to make the most difference.

**Tom McINTOSH:** How do you see that flowing through to the economic productivity and the input the regions make to our state? I think of the investment we have seen, whether it is rail and major road upgrades, that connectivity, or whether it is public transport so that people living in the regions can travel anywhere in Victoria for the same price as our metro residents, so that they can get out and be amongst the regions. How do you think this investment is going to see that sort of long-term economic productivity of our regional and rural Victoria?

**Harriet SHING:** We know that rural and regional Victoria is an enormous driver of our economic prosperity. We also know that it takes all levels of government to come together to ensure that that momentum continues. We have invested at least \$41 billion in regional and rural Victoria since 2014. Within the housing space it is about making sure that we are partnering across, again, all levels of government. When we look at the recent investment of about \$497 million from the Commonwealth, that adds to the work that we are doing already in the largest housing reform in this state or indeed in any other Australian jurisdiction. That leans into the challenges of population growth but also what we want to achieve by way of livability and connectivity. We want to make sure that in delivering housing it is done in locations that mean that people are connected to their communities, that people have opportunities to participate in any number of different ways and that our towns and our regional centres actually flourish in the right way and with a sense of input and ownership from communities now and into the future.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr McIntosh. Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you, Ms Shing. Mr Garner from the OCG testified in his appearance that a request came from the ministry to:

... do some work and provide advice, which we did do ...

to reduce the costs, including for the athletes villages and legacy housing. You confirmed this on 30 August in the house when you said:

That was a decision that was taken after every option available to us was examined ...

Were you the minister who made the request to DJSIR to reduce the costs, and if not, who was?

**Harriet SHING:** A request? Sorry, Ms Bath, what was the? – I am struggling with context in Hansard here, and I am going to be a bit cautious about it, given I have had quotes misattributed to me by your colleagues in the past.

**Melina BATH:** So Mr Garner said that a request came from government to do some work and provide advice –

**Harriet SHING:** From government or from the minister? Because you are now just changing what you just said.

**David DAVIS:** From the ministry as government.

**Melina BATH:** From the ministry – to do some work in relation to reducing the costs of athletes villages and legacy housing. Were you part of that request to reduce costs on legacy and the athletes villages?

**Harriet SHING:** Right. Firstly, I do not know what the question was that was asked. Secondly, there were a range of conversations that occurred over the course of my time in the portfolio that were about understanding cost, understanding how we could deliver on legacy and making sure to my purposes, as legacy minister, that that \$2.6 billion in the budget was deployed to the best extent possible.

**Melina BATH:** What options were examined by you as part of this government between April and June, what options about reducing costs? And in your words, they were escalating costs; I think others have said budget blowouts. But escalating costs – what options were looked at?

**Harriet SHING:** The options as they related to the opening and closing ceremonies, as they related to – again let me just go back to perhaps the information that I provided in my opening remarks –

**Melina BATH:** I will put it in context, Minister.

**Harriet SHING:** Yes.

**Melina BATH:** We have heard from Commonwealth Games Australia that in April they provided mitigating strategies to government on the hubs to reduce costs. So did government look at those, and why did they reject those proposals?

**Harriet SHING:** That government was provided with options to mitigate costs – which options are you talking about? Again, I am struggling with the context that you are putting to me.

**Melina BATH:** All right. Give us your position, give us your overview, on how you assessed options to mitigate both athletes villages and legacy projects. That is the first question – briefly, please, Minister.

**Harriet SHING:** Athletes villages again is a Commonwealth Games delivery portfolio responsibility.

**David DAVIS:** So the answer is none.

**Melina BATH:** That is right.

**Harriet SHING:** Well, Mr Davis, it is really hard for me to assist the committee if you keep interjecting. Ms Bath, you have asked about the villages, and I have indicated in my opening remarks that the villages sat with Commonwealth Games delivery. The legacy housing was about what we did after the games, and that then translated into the \$1 billion. This was about making sure that we understood what the impact would be of delivering those legacy outcomes and how that could be achieved, deploying to the best extent possible that \$2.6 billion in the budget. That is reflected in the regional package, Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** In relation to hubs, in this case all around the regions, we have heard that Commonwealth Games Australia certainly in April provided mitigating strategies about costs. Have you reviewed any of those?

**Harriet SHING:** They were a constant discussion as part of what you do within any major project. Again, I think Mr Weimar gave evidence about this work needing to be done because it is part of understanding how the nature of estimates changes over time and that increases in costs were associated as much as anything else with workforce shortages, with the impact on materials. I think the impact of post-COVID recovery was being felt.

**Melina BATH:** Minister, I am seeking to understand why your government rejected those mitigation strategies.

**Harriet SHING:** Again to go back to evidence that was provided by Mr Weimar, you cannot unilaterally change a contract where there are three parties. There were three parties to the host contract: the CGF, the CGA and the government.

**Melina BATH:** If CGF and CGA are prepared to look at modifying the contract, then the government is the sticking point.

**Harriet SHING:** Are they, Ms Bath?

**David DAVIS:** That is the evidence we have.

**Melina BATH:** That is the evidence we have heard. We have heard it from Mr Phillips that they were willing to. Clearly the government is the sticking point.

**Harriet SHING:** I do not accept that characterisation, Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. At PAEC on 8 June when asked what the split was between the running of the games and legacy, you said:

We are in the process of developing the split around where allocation will occur and how ...

Yet multiple witnesses we have had in this committee – Mr Weimar, Mr Garner, Secretary Ada – all testified that the split was \$1.6 billion for running the games and \$1 billion for legacy infrastructure. Why were you not across your brief on 8 June if you were still saying, ‘We are developing this’?

**Harriet SHING:** Well, legacy infrastructure is one part of this work, and that is where the legacy infrastructure is reflected in the regional package to the tune of \$550 million in your upgraded sporting infrastructure and \$1 billion in social and affordable housing, as well as infrastructure components within the Regional Tourism and Events Fund, within the community sports fund, within the all-abilities fund and potentially within the Tiny Towns Fund. Again, when you characterise this as infrastructure and delivery, you are missing out on the program component of that, Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you, Minister. The last media release prior to its cancellation was put out by the government on the Commonwealth Games on 9 May 2023. Your last social media post on the Commonwealth Games was on 12 May 2023. Between 9 May and 18 July, 27 media releases were issued under your name, yet none were on the Commonwealth Games. Why?

**Harriet SHING:** I think, Ms Bath, that I was pretty prolific in the house and that I did a number of interviews and I was asked a number of questions about the Commonwealth Games legacy work.

**Melina BATH:** It is different in the house to being promoted in the public eye by media release. It is quite different.

**Harriet SHING:** I was doing events, Ms Bath. I was having conversations. I was out in regional Victoria meeting with councils, meeting with organisations and talking with regional partnerships. Ms Bath, this was a constant feature of my engagement. If you are judging the work that I am doing by media release, then that perhaps indicates more about you than about me.

**Melina BATH:** Minister, did you direct your department in May not to provide further opportunities for media releases on the Commonwealth Games?

**Harriet SHING:** No.

**Melina BATH:** Was nothing happening in your Commonwealth Games portfolio, or was the lack of otherwise relentless promotion a sign that you knew the games were in trouble?

**Harriet SHING:** No. I am struggling with that question. Sorry, can you repeat the question?

**Melina BATH:** There was a flurry of them, and then they automatically stopped back in May. Did you know that the Commonwealth Games was in deep trouble back in May –

**Harriet SHING:** No.

**Melina BATH:** and halted your media, halted your Facebook – halted that? You did not want to be associated with that, because it is very clear.

**Harriet SHING:** Are you attributing interest to social media posts, Ms Bath? That is unfortunate, given the objective of engagement is actually to be out on the ground.

**Melina BATH:** Minister, and Commonwealth Games releases – you just stopped it in its tracks.

**Harriet SHING:** I was out talking with rural and regional communities about the games, about legacy.

**Melina BATH:** Quietly, quietly.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Bath. Mrs Tyrrell.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** I have missed so much of the conversation because we are getting hit by a windstorm. I apologise. If I ask questions that may have been answered previously, please forgive me. What stakeholder consultation did you undertake as part of your ministerial responsibilities as Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy? Can you please elaborate on that a bit more? I think you touched on it in your opening statement.

**Harriet SHING:** Yes. Thank you, Mrs Tyrrell, for that question. There was extensive consultation and discussion about delivery of the games and the legacy benefits that would flow from that. I am somewhat bemused by Ms Bath's question around engagement, because nothing could be further from the truth than the

assertions that have been made. There were numerous engagements and consultations across rural and regional Victoria, including with the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery and the then Minister for Housing Minister Brooks after the regional package was announced. Prior to that there were forums that occurred all the way around the hub locations to discuss the legacy work and to talk about opportunities to deliver positive social, economic and community-based outcomes within those pillars, as I talked to in my opening statement. I was absolutely determined to have ongoing conversations with communities, with representatives, with local councils, with community organisations and with people in business and industry to whom this legacy work would apply. In doing that and in having those conversations, the regional partnerships were really important and remain really important in the delivery of the regional package. That sort of model of engagement comprises leaders and representatives from across communities, but also in the forums that occurred there were groups that came together, particularly to talk about visitation and marketing and tourism opportunities but also around the way in which economic growth could be enhanced through primary production, agriculture, horticulture and viticulture and the way in which marketing could occur to promote the really brilliant, unique qualities of rural and regional Victoria. I am not sure, Mrs Tyrrell, if you are still with us.

**The CHAIR:** Mrs Tyrrell is not still with us, but that is okay.

**Harriet SHING:** Okay. Right. Sorry. You could have stopped me about five sentences ago.

**The CHAIR:** No, that is fine. You were still giving evidence for the record, so that is fine. I am sure she will be back soon. I would like to ask another question. You stated earlier that the first conversation that you had around the possibility of cancelling the games was on 22 June. We know that a number of people, including people from the department, engaged the lawyers on 14 June. So that means there were eight days. It would appear that there was some decision, presumably, to ensure that you did not know about it until that point. Like, your role was a very important part of the entire thing, the entire event, including things with the games themselves like the open ceremony and that sort of thing. Why do you think that decision was made to not inform you until the 22nd that this was actually happening?

**Harriet SHING:** I am not going to speculate on the reasons.

**The CHAIR:** But you did not ask afterwards – like, why? I mean, that would be my response: ‘Why didn’t you tell me last week?’

**Harriet SHING:** Well, I was given the information when I was given it. I met with Ms Allan on the 22nd. This is my evidence and I stand by my evidence. That was the first time that I was advised that consideration was being given to cancelling the games. There had been a whole range of conversations about cost pressures and about challenges to delivering the games. I think Mr Weimar said in his evidence that it was not about putting on the games – that was possible – it was about the costs associated with it and the value proposition that was intended to underpin delivery of a regional multilocation games themselves. You know, I was advised that advice was being sought. Again, that decision was not taken until the 17th, and that decision was taken by reference to the advice that was provided prior to that decision, of which I became aware of being sought on 22 June. So that was what it was. I accepted that I was being told on that day. I am not going to pretend that it was not a difficult thing to hear, but having said that, I appreciated that we needed to take the advice and to understand what the options looked like. Again, the benefit to Victorians, as underpinned by the rationale for a multilocation regional games, was what drove the regional package. And again, that was about \$2.6 billion. My objectives were always centred around delivering legacy within that \$2.6 billion.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Thank you. I believe, Ms Bath and Dr Mansfield, you have – I think Dr Mansfield got cut off halfway through a question.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you.

**Harriet SHING:** I think I said I would take something on notice for you before, so I will look into that too, yes.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Yes. That would be great. I guess this is just going back to, again, using the Armstrong Creek pool as an example. You were saying that the decision around the location was really around delivery of the games and then legacy was secondary.

**Harriet SHING:** They were also decisions taken before I took the portfolio on, so they were well established by the time I was sworn in, if that is of assistance to you.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** You were sworn in immediately after Mr Leane?

**Harriet SHING:** There was a break, so it was 10 December. Was it the 10th? I do not have my statement to hand.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Okay. Because he said at that stage it was still a bit of an idea about where that pool would be located in Armstrong Creek. I guess I am just trying to understand how we went from a business case that said it should be at Kardinia –

**Harriet SHING:** 14 December. Sorry, if I can just correct the record here, it was not the 10th, it was 14 December. Yes, sorry.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** In the business case the pool was to be at Kardinia Park. It was the preferred location of a number of key stakeholders, including Swimming Victoria and others we have heard from – potentially local government in the area as well. But we have been told that one of the prime drivers for putting it in at Armstrong Creek, where it is not near transport or is not particularly convenient for a lot of reasons, was actually for the legacy aspect of it, because you have got a growing population there. So I am just wondering how it was determined that that was the best location to leave a legacy for that community. Like, what analysis was done around the legacy that this infrastructure was going to leave, and how did that inform then what was delivered? Or was it just, ‘We think this’ll be nice afterwards’? Like, was it a vibe thing or was there an analysis done to determine where this should be?

**Harriet SHING:** No. This was not based in a vibe. I mean, livability is about the sort of term that you have just used. But why don’t I take that on notice and perhaps get you some further information to the extent that I can.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you.

**Harriet SHING:** Yes. Legacy delivery components are indeed a split, but let me see what I can assist you with.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** That would be great.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Dr Mansfield. Mr Davis.

**David DAVIS:** I just want to turn, Minister, to 22 June, when you met with the minister at the time Ms Allan. What was the context of that and what was discussed? Was it just about the budget cost blowouts and the likelihood of cancellation?

**Harriet SHING:** Again, Mr Davis, this was about cost pressures, and I have been really clear about that.

**David DAVIS:** What else was discussed? Was that all that was discussed?

**Harriet SHING:** When I met with Minister Allan, then Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery, it was in response to a request from her to meet, and when we met she advised me that cancellation was going to be considered in light of escalating cost pressures.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you –

**David DAVIS:** I just had one more question.

**The CHAIR:** If you could make it brief, please, Mr Davis.

**David DAVIS:** Yes, I will. Through you, Chair, just this document that is in the public domain – and this is the 19 August document. The \$6.865 billion – the government attributed \$2 billion in additional cost pressures. Both Allen Garner and Jeroen Weimar testified to the committee they had not seen these figures. I am just asking you now: where did they come from and when did you become aware of them?

**Harriet SHING:** I am happy to take that on notice and see what I can provide to you, Mr Davis.

**David DAVIS:** This is the release that came out.

**Melina BATH:** We have seen that release.

**David DAVIS:** A public document.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. If Ms Shing would be happy enough to take that notice.

**Harriet SHING:** Why don't I take that on notice, Mr Davis, and see what I can provide you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Shing. Thank you very much for appearing today.

**Harriet SHING:** Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** You will receive a copy of the transcript for review in about a week. The committee will now adjourn.

**Committee adjourned.**