

# **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates**

Melbourne – Monday 25 May 2026

### **MEMBERS**

Sarah Connolly – Chair

John Pesutto – Deputy Chair

Jade Benham

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Aiv Puglielli

Richard Riordan

Meng Heang Tak



**WITNESSES**

Maree Edwards, Speaker, Legislative Assembly;

Shaun Leane, President, Legislative Council;

Bridget Noonan, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly;

Robert McDonald, Clerk of the Legislative Council; and

Trish Burrows, Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services

**The CHAIR:** I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent. On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside of this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and is broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The broadcast includes automatic captioning. Witnesses and members should be aware that all microphones are live during hearings, and anything you say may be picked up and captioned, even if you say it very quietly.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check, and verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

I welcome the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Honourable Maree Edwards, as well as the President of the Legislative Council, the Honourable Shaun Leane, as well as heads of department. I am going to invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes, after which time committee members will ask you some questions. Your time starts now.

**Maree EDWARDS:** Thank you, Chair. Obviously, we begin by acknowledging the First Nations people on the land on which we are gathered and the Parliament stands, the Woi-wurrung Wurundjeri people, and pay our respects to elders past and present.

As you would know, we have a First Nations focus across our Parliament, and we have implemented some significant changes in relation to that ongoing work, including cultural protocols in all three departments; our Youth Yarning with Mob, which was established this year with our Koorie Academy; and obviously consideration of the treaty within the Parliament as well.

Parliament for the people is something that we are both very passionate about as Presiding Officers, and we have worked very hard over the last four years since we became Presiding Officers to ensure that our democracy is supported and respected within our Parliament and works towards, always, a good outcome in relation to democracy. Parliament for the people focuses on our Parliament House tours, which have seen a significant uptake, particularly in the gardens and architecture tours. Engaging school students and schools is something that we are very proud of, and we have had over 20,000 students as part of our school engagement over the last 12 months. And of course we work very hard to ensure that we have teachers and university students as part of everything that we do.

In terms of Parliament for the people, along with the Speaker's breakfast series, there have been a number of different groups that have come into the Parliament sponsored by members but also of course by the President, including the autism groups that came in not that long ago. We have had the Women's Health Services Network; women in community sport, which was a celebration of International Women's Day; carers; the horticultural industry, which I know is a very popular event in Queens Hall for all members; and of course many culturally and linguistically diverse groups as well. Our tours and customer service unit have had a regional school visits program, which is very, very popular, and they deliver role-plays to our schools in country areas by visiting schools in that particular area. This year they visited four different areas – Shepparton and Echuca, Colac, Stawell and Wonthaggi – and a number of schools in regional Victoria. In terms of Parliament for the people, with teacher engagement, pre-service teachers participate in our professional learning

programs, mostly run by our wonderful staff here in the Parliament. Something that we are very proud of is the introduction of the Parliament in Auslan series, which is a group of videos produced with Deaf Victoria. This is a new situation for our Parliament; we have not done that before.

Something else that is just being rolled out, starting from last month, is a partnership with our neighbourhood houses to deliver 13 civic projects. Of course young people are engaging with our Parliament as well to ensure that they have good pathways to in-demand industries. Our social media presence has increased significantly, with more than 1 million views on our YouTube channel. I might throw to the President.

**Shaun LEANE:** Yes, we have become influencers. The new committee rooms obviously opened earlier this year. A lot of thought was put into how these committee rooms would work and function, and if you have been there, you will notice the permanent set-up for broadcasting and Hansard. Since the start of this term broadcasting committee hearings has been a priority. There are a lot of references that people are really interested in, so we have got the permanent set-up. Also, you have all been around a while; you would have seen the old set-up we used to have, where we would have witnesses waiting in the actual public gallery space. We have got special witness rooms. We have made sure we have got different entries for the public gallery and the witnesses and also the MPs and the staff. We think they have been a great outcome. They are something that, as I said, we put a lot of thought into. We are very happy with them, and hopefully the members, the witnesses and the public that come to see these particular hearings are happy with that. I am not going to waste 10 seconds, so over to you.

**The CHAIR:** There is nothing worse than a time-waster, President. In saying that, we are going to give 7 minutes to Mr Riordan.

**Richard RIORDAN:** Thank you, Chair. Speaker, I will address it to you. There has been a lot of work, as we know, going on for a long time on those upper floors. Could you please tell the committee about level 3, which has been undergoing refurbishment, and identify the intended uses of those spaces?

**Maree EDWARDS:** Yes. Levels 3 and 4 have been completed – they have actually been completed. The issue more recently that we have had – and I will throw to the Secretary in a moment – was an issue with the pipes and the delivery of water underground. There had to be some extra work done before we could get a certificate of occupancy, and also FRV were required to sign off on some work in relation to safety measures with water. We are in fact just waiting for that sign-off from FRV so we can have a certificate of occupancy.

**Richard RIORDAN:** What are some of the uses of those spaces?

**Maree EDWARDS:** If you just bear with me, up in the top part there are a big meeting room and several committee rooms. The Legislative Council staff will be utilising some of those spaces. On the next level there is also another big meeting room as well as office spaces, a small multipurpose room, a reflection and prayer room and office space for the Department of the Legislative Assembly. On the lower level there is a help desk, which will be up during sitting weeks, which DPS will be looking after, and also some storage space down below for catering and possibly for security.

**Richard RIORDAN:** Okay. Thank you. Are any of the level 3 spaces or level 4 spaces intended, proposed, reserved, allocated or being considered for the First Peoples' Assembly, Gellung Warl, its members, secretariat, advisers, officers, staff or any related treaty bodies in line with the treaty provisions?

**Maree EDWARDS:** I will throw to the President.

**Shaun LEANE:** The larger room on level 4 is going to be a dedicated First Nations room. That body will have use of it; they will not have exclusive use of it. Actually, since the last time I was a Presiding Officer – when I had a crack and obviously did not do a great job and then came back – eight years ago, there has been quite a push from a number of MPs that we should be like other parliaments and have a dedicated First Nations room where we can celebrate the great fact that we live in a land where we have got the oldest living culture in the world, of 65,000 years, similar to other jurisdictions that already –

**Richard RIORDAN:** President, will that meeting room be where Gellung Warl meets?

**Shaun LEANE:** From time to time. My understanding is they want to meet all across country, so they may have a few meetings in that space. As I said, it will not be exclusive to them or any other actual First Nations group, but they will get a degree of priority because it is the First Nations room. But we want people who meet, who have functions or whatever activity, from all walks of life and all different organisations to actually utilise that room.

**Richard RIORDAN:** But will it be the official Gellung Warl meeting chamber, if you like?

**Maree EDWARDS:** Can I just jump in there that we actually are required under the legislation to provide a room for the First Nations group, but the President and I have yet to meet with the Gellung Warl group, the new leadership, so we have not had that conversation with them yet. But we imagine –

**Richard RIORDAN:** But is it one or two rooms, sorry, Speaker?

**Maree EDWARDS:** It is one room.

**Richard RIORDAN:** It is one room?

**Maree EDWARDS:** One room and possibly some office space if required at certain times.

**Richard RIORDAN:** Right. So would you envisage Gellung Warl having its official deliberative meetings in this space?

**Maree EDWARDS:** That would be entirely dependent on what Gellung Warl tell us that they want.

**Shaun LEANE:** They may. It is no different to – there are organisations that have meetings in these spaces all the time.

**Richard RIORDAN:** I guess what I am getting to is that Gellung Warl of course is very different to – it is our maiden voyage on this treaty process. I guess I am also keen to know – and perhaps the Presiding Officers might know: will conversations in that space carry a privilege when they are held in this building, as in a parliamentary privilege? Do you envisage –

**Shaun LEANE:** No. I can defer to the clerks, but the only parliamentary privilege is these sorts of committee hearings and the sittings in the chambers.

**Richard RIORDAN:** So, because it is an official meeting space in the building, it will not have connotations of privilege that other –

**Shaun LEANE:** It is no – if you think that it is a third chamber, like the discussions that were had at a federal level –

**Richard RIORDAN:** Well, I guess that is where I am heading.

**Shaun LEANE:** Well, I can allay your concerns that that is not the case.

**Richard RIORDAN:** It absolutely is not the case? In terms of the capital expenditure that has been in the restoration of the building, how much of that funding has come from the large sums allocated in the 2025–26 budget for treaty capital works? Has that been funded in some part, or is that –

**Shaun LEANE:** No.

**Richard RIORDAN:** Right. So the Parliament itself has paid for these spaces?

**Shaun LEANE:** Well, yes. And I think there were a lot of connotations of what those spaces could be.

**Richard RIORDAN:** Just quickly, in the very short amount of time we have left, I think Gellung Warl starts in July and we are now near the end of May. So the Parliament has not yet determined where they are meeting, how they are meeting and what spaces and services are being provided for by the Parliament?

**Maree EDWARDS:** We have not met with Gellung Warl yet, so we cannot predetermine what they want.

**Richard RIORDAN:** When are you planning to meet with them?

**Maree EDWARDS:** I think that is the proposal. Yes, we will be meeting with them.

**Richard RIORDAN:** Sorry?

**Maree EDWARDS:** We will be meeting with them, yes.

**Richard RIORDAN:** Are you going to meet in the next two weeks?

**Shaun LEANE:** We envisage that space, if it is acceptable, will be utilised for a First Nations room. This has been an aspiration of ours for many years, to replicate what other jurisdictions and other parliaments have as well. So if that is dedicated as a First Nations room, I would envisage that Gellung Warl will utilise that space, and we are happy for them to do that. As I said, we celebrate – that is actually something we like to –

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, President. I am going to move straight on to Mr Hilakari.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** President, I cannot but agree with you that the acknowledgement and having space for the longest living culture that the world has ever seen is something important in this Parliament that sits on these grounds. However, President, I will direct my first question to the Speaker. It is a direct follow-on from our discussion last year about the upper balcony in the people's chamber. It previously had a capacity of 15 persons. I predicted in these hearings last year that it would continue to be sold out. What is the capacity now, and does it remain the hottest ticket in town?

**Maree EDWARDS:** It does indeed. As members would be aware, we did actually spend quite a significant amount of money in delivering some works on the balustrade across the top of the upper balcony there –

**Mathew HILAKARI:** I feel much more secure.

**Maree EDWARDS:** which was very dangerous, and there were some concerns with safety not just for people who were observing but for our staff in the Parliament as well. What the changes have delivered is something that I think is very similar to what Westminster has. I do not know if any of you have been to Westminster, but the design and the fit-out of the upper gallery now is very, very similar to what you see at Westminster. While we make sure that we can fit as many people as we can into the upper gallery, we are always mindful of security and we are also very mindful of making sure that those that really need to be there and want to be there, particularly our students who come in regularly, have an opportunity to sit in that upper gallery. The capacity has not changed that much. It is just that the layout looks a little different.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Have we got plans to increase that capacity, because I am regularly just before question time with wonderful people from across our communities who are seeking access.

**Maree EDWARDS:** Yes, you are a regular. You are. I think again, as I mentioned, we have to be very mindful of security and making sure that people are not too crammed in up there, that there is comfort when they are sitting there watching from the upper galleries. But we will continue to monitor that.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Can we take it higher than the 15 we have got at the moment?

**Maree EDWARDS:** I think that would depend on advice from our attendants and security.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** I will put it on the record that I am very keen to see that enlarged, because there are lots of people who would like to see the Parliament in action.

**Maree EDWARDS:** We do have more than that when there is a school group in, so yes.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Thank you. I will move on to the President and the 55 St Andrew's Place committee rooms, which you mentioned in your presentation. Just hoping you can talk about some of the further advantages that we will see from these upgrades and what it means for witnesses, which you have gone into a little detail on, but the general public as well.

**Shaun LEANE:** Yes. As I said, we have put a lot of thought into this. We kind of feel like now we might be leading the way, particularly at a state level, as far as what committee rooms look like. As I said before, the

interest in committee hearings has increased, which is a fantastic thing. It is a really important core business of the Parliament, as you know, along with sittings. We have the ability to invite as many members of the public as we can to a number of the larger rooms that we have, but we take into account that there are some references that some people have certain views about and are very passionate about, which is fantastic. That is what we want. But in saying that, we have had situations in previous years where, as I said, the next witnesses are sitting in the same space as the people that are very passionate about the reference and may not agree with the next witnesses' views about that particular reference. So we have got a situation now where, as I said, there are separate entrances for members of the gallery. There is a separate entrance for the witness and the staff and the MPs. There are breakout rooms for the committees like right next door to the committee rooms. There is a separation in the gallery as far as in the chamber. What is really important and is going to save us a lot of money going forward as a Parliament is there is a permanent set-up for broadcasting and Hansard. If you speak to the men and women who work in broadcasting in the Victorian Parliament, they are really proud of the product they are putting out online, along with the product they send from the chambers as well, so it is a constant improvement.

Like I said, we want to be leaders in this area. We have had people from other jurisdictions have a look at our new committee rooms that have been established. We have taken the opportunity to name some of the committee rooms. As you know, there was a committee room named after our twin for Fiji for quite a while. Recently we had Nauru MPs come across, another of our twinning partners, and we have named a committee room after their Parliament. We are having conversations with Tuvalu around another smaller committee room. It has been a great opportunity. I would like to just shout-out to everyone involved, the clerks and Secretary. It was a great project. It was done in such a quick time. A shout-out to all the people that worked on it as well. We look forward to other jurisdictions coming to look at the way we have done it. We think we have done it in a fantastic way, and we are happy to spruik it more.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Thank you. I want to thank you as well just for your service to the Parliament. I understand this will be your last PAEC hearing. We have always appreciated everything you have done to encourage people in the Parliament but also the way that you have gone about your business, so I just want to thank you, President, for all that effort. I am going to quickly move to the east wing refurbishment project and just check for an update on that. We had some information in the department questionnaire on that one. This is the east wing project, and it might be for the Secretary.

**Trish BURROWS:** This year we have been working on getting it ready for the certificate of occupancy, as the Speaker mentioned. I think I have explained previously here the issue has been the height of those rooms and making sure that water can get up to them, from a fire perspective. There have been a number of tests done and things repaired – tested, repaired, tested, repaired. We hope very shortly we will be able to announce that we have a certificate of occupancy, but we are waiting for the final nod.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Thank you.

**Shaun LEANE:** Can I just add to that too –

**The CHAIR:** Apologies, President. I am a ruthless timekeeper.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Another question might come along for you, President. He has got some latitude on his last hearing, surely.

**The CHAIR:** We are going to Ms Benham.

**Jade BENHAM:** Thank you, Chair. I want to talk about the new sculpture that is coming to the parliamentary grounds. There has been a lot of interest in the location. Is that going to be located in Treasury Place where the others are? Who makes that decision then?

**Shaun LEANE:** Which statue?

**Jade BENHAM:** Daniel's statue.

**Shaun LEANE:** Daniel Andrews's statue?

**Jade BENHAM:** Yes.

**Shaun LEANE:** There will not be any statues of premiers in the parliamentary precinct.

**Jade BENHAM:** Not on the parliamentary precinct?

**Shaun LEANE:** No.

**Jade BENHAM:** Okay.

**Shaun LEANE:** We actually used to have a lot of busts – you know, the governor of Zimbabwe from 1772 to something.

**Jade BENHAM:** They are in Treasury Gardens, aren't they?

**Shaun LEANE:** I do not know.

**Jade BENHAM:** Is that where it is going?

**Shaun LEANE:** We kind of got over having statues of blokes everywhere.

**Jade BENHAM:** Great. Where is it going? Is it going in Treasury Gardens? Cavill Avenue, Surfers Paradise?

**Maree EDWARDS:** It is not our department. It is nothing that the Presiding Officers have any say over.

**Jade BENHAM:** You do not have any say over it. Okay. Who does decide that?

**Maree EDWARDS:** I believe it is the Premier's department.

**Jade BENHAM:** Okay. All right. I want to talk about security. Actually first of all, President, you and I spoke about the annexe last year, the leaky annexe. That is still leaking, and yet there have been –

**Richard Riordan** interjected.

**Jade BENHAM:** Yes. There have been millions spent on –

**Shaun LEANE:** Yes. I was quite happy to take that away. There is going to be some remedial work done after the last sitting week. Before the next full week there is going to be a lot of work done on remediation. We are still very unhappy. We are as unhappy as anyone, and we are on the way of taking legal recourses.

**Jade BENHAM:** And taking the award – it won an award, that building, didn't it?

**Shaun LEANE:** They won many awards. It won many, many awards.

**Jade BENHAM:** Are you going to take them back?

**Shaun LEANE:** Well, I think if we could give it to whoever came second, whoever they are, we would.

**Jade BENHAM:** No-one remembers who came second ever, though, do they?

**John PESUTTO:** Just take a leap of faith.

**Maree EDWARDS:** If I could just add to that, we do continually monitor what is happening in the annexe, and there have been some members who have been impacted by the water egress. So we are making sure that we constantly look to see and to make sure that that water egress is not happening or that we can mitigate it. But as the President said, this is a problem, a wicked problem, that we inherited, and unfortunately the cost to the Parliament of restoration and fixing this problem is significant.

**Jade BENHAM:** Yes. No doubt. Can we talk about security upgrades and things that have happened? These are on budget paper 4, 'State Capital Program', page 80. I am sure you are all well across this, but do we have an idea of, and can we talk about, how many security incidents, threats, unauthorised access incidents, aggressive public interactions, protests, vandalism events or police call-outs have happened at Parliament House and electorate offices in the past year?

**Maree EDWARDS:** We do. It has always been my policy not to discuss security matters in detail in public forums, but I can advise that there has been a reduction.

**Jade BENHAM:** A reduction?

**Maree EDWARDS:** A reduction across the board.

**Jade BENHAM:** A significant reduction?

**Maree EDWARDS:** A modest reduction in the number of security incidents across all sectors.

**Jade BENHAM:** Is the number something you can provide the committee, though?

**Maree EDWARDS:** We can provide that offline, yes.

**Jade BENHAM:** Great. Thank you so much. What additional security measures and support are being proposed or considered for members and their offices in the context of the upcoming election? The Premier's office was vandalised over the weekend, I believe.

**Maree EDWARDS:** I think the risk assessments have already been done for all of the electorate offices. They were completed. That was a rolling program over the last couple of years to make sure that all the electorate offices were in a secure space. Obviously cameras are installed in all of the electorate offices – that is at the minimum standard – the access controls are in place, the interface screens are now in place and the duress alarms are also in place for electorate offices. In terms of the parliamentary precinct – I might get the Secretary to speak to this in more detail – we are about to launch the perimeter detection system, which is new. I might get the Secretary just to talk a little bit about that one.

**Trish BURROWS:** Here in the Parliament House area of the precinct, having been designed so many years ago, it does not have the perimeter fence that you would have in a modern-day building. So we have been concentrating over the last couple of years on making sure that we deploy appropriate technology on the perimeter. The door to Parliament House, apart from the front steps, is after you get inside. So the effort for the last couple of years really, but certainly over the last 12 months, has been to deploy technology on the perimeter.

**Jade BENHAM:** Okay. Terrific. Can we talk about what specific security risks, threats or incidents have driven the continual upgrade to Parliament House and electorate office security upgrades that were identified in the questionnaire and what the costs incurred might be?

**Trish BURROWS:** I would have to take the costs on notice. There have been continual upgrades since about 2018, since when there have been different overlays put into electorate offices. As we move an electorate office or create a new one, we again upgrade the technology, the cameras et cetera, the positioning of those. The Speaker referred to the risk assessment. That is done by the team to work out where that needs to go in an electorate office, and that is continual over a period of time, so I would need to come back on an absolute cost. Here on the precinct, again with this building, it is not possible to separate public and private because of the design. If you go to a modern Parliament that has been built in the last 20 or 30 years, they are very separate. We cannot do that, so we are continuing to put in place different ways to separate and ensure that the building remains safe and secure. The Speaker talked about the upper gallery. That was a security project, really, in many ways to make that a safer environment. Those are continually happening. For an overall cost for that I would have to come back to you on the different activities that have taken place.

**Jade BENHAM:** No problem. Thank you.

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

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, President, Speaker, Secretary and clerks. Thank you for joining us today. Secretary, the department's questionnaire, page 11, improvement of services to members: your department puts quite restrictive checklists that new electorate officers are required to meet, which has led to members being out of a permanent office for some time – long periods of time in some cases. A new Assembly member this term was out of an office for 15 months, and as you know, I have been out for

27 months now. Do you accept that the requirements that DPS puts on what a new electorate office needs to meet are too restrictive?

**Trish BURROWS:** Thanks for the question. The standards have been set now for, I want to say, about five to seven years. Those standards when they were approved did go through the House Committee at the time to get to the standard. We have recently reviewed those. We also look at those in that when we have not been able to find a location over a period of time, we will start to look to how we can mitigate the risk that is presented by not complying with those standards. We will also talk to a member. For example, we aim for 150 square metres for an office, but we might find one that is 135. Is the member happy with the smaller amount? Of course we lease these offices for 10, 20 years. It is not just that member that we need to think about, which is why the standards are so important, because an incoming member can also accept that the office is going to be – the other thing we have instituted is the leasing of serviced offices in the electorate. Where previously we would ask members to come into the city, we now look for a serviced office in the electorate. Not all electorates are equal when it comes to the availability of serviced offices of course, but we do try to find those.

**Michael GALEA:** As you know, there have been issues with incredibly small spaces, single rooms that the entire office is meant to work in – internet not working, printers not working.

**Trish BURROWS:** Yes.

**Michael GALEA:** As you know, the reason I am in the city is because we did try that option. I do want to actually acknowledge and emphasise the efforts of your team, in the property team – I will not name names, but especially the one with the initials J-A – for the outstanding work that they have done. This situation is certainly not through lack of effort on the team's part, but I am just concerned that we have had a number of cases now where processes or applications have been delayed by internal DPS processes, or we have had them outright blocked. Suggestions that I have put forward for modifications of different properties have been blocked. Perhaps if I can give an example. I have been out for two years and three months now. In February last year, so 12 months after being out of an office, I sent a list of five potential offices in my electorate which were all up for lease. They were all rejected on the grounds of building issues or multiple floors – they were split level or on higher floors. In recent days I have had a list put forward to me of five potential offices. One of them is in the same building that was previously rejected by your department and another one is actually the exact same unit that was rejected a year ago. Given it has taken two years and three months to get to this point, where is the breaking point where you will take a look and say, 'Okay, we need to actually change course here'

**Trish BURROWS:** I am aware that that office was put back on the table. It was put back on as a temporary one, so not one that we would take a 10-year lease on. We would do a lower cost fit-out. We would amortise it over a shorter period of time because you have been out of an office for so long. Previously when that was considered, we were looking for a 10-year lease or a five-plus-five-plus-five lease, a significant investment in that for the fit-out and costs. At the moment we are looking at offices that we can do temporary, short-term leases. They will be more costly, but to get members into their office. So that is sort of how we come down to going, 'Well, maybe this office is suitable for a short period of time.' Just this member, not thinking about future members and that is how that one has come back on the table.

**Michael GALEA:** Okay. In the same budget paper reference, the questionnaire says, under 'Continuous Improvement of Services to Members', review our service delivery and identify areas for improvement. You spoke about the review five years ago under this strategic issue. In the next budget year that you have outlined, what reviews, if any, do you intend to do on how you can make sure that MPs are able to have offices in their electorates and actually be accessible to their constituents?

**Trish BURROWS:** We have recently reviewed, as I mentioned before, the standards and how they might work. Ahead of the election, where there are quite a lot of changeovers as well, we have gone through looking at how we need to be ready for that and ahead of time, whether an office search is going on, or where the member is a retiring member, we are continuing that office search, even though the member is retiring. Previously we would have sort of held it in abeyance and waited for the next member to try and get ready. Of course at the last election there was a change of boundaries, and that did mean a lot of offices needed to change at that time, and they were prioritised to get the members out of the office that they were in in their former boundary and in the boundary of the new boundary. We will not need to deal with this this time around, so we

are hoping that there will be less. But still there will need to be attention, and we have already started working on that.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. Questionnaire, page 44, handovers of electorate offices. A new member who is elected later this year cannot be assured that they will have a permanent office for the majority of their first term. Is that an accurate statement?

**Trish BURROWS:** No, I do not think so. At the moment we have two members, including yourself, without what we call a permanent office. One of them is in a serviced office in their electorate. So without a boundary change, we would expect the incoming members to go into the existing office of the current member.

**Michael GALEA:** So the issues of this term were, in my case, being more than two years, more than half the term, out of an office. You can assure any prospective new members of Parliament coming in at the end of this year that they will not be in that situation?

**Trish BURROWS:** I think it would be unwise for me to give that assurance. Offices can get flooded. An office can have damage to it that the landlord does not fix, that we are waiting for the landlord to fix a roof of until we can go back in and be safe – that we are in other's hands. We do not control the entire environment of that office, and also some electorates just do not have suitable office space so we have to really wait for one to become available. I do not think I can give you that assurance, but I can say we will put every effort into ensuring that members are not out of their electorate for any length of time.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Secretary.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Galea. We are going to Mr Pesutto.

**John PESUTTO:** Thank you. Good morning, everybody. Can I just follow up on a question Ms Benham was asking around the statue. In relation to the portrait of the former Premier, Mr Andrews, is the portrait of Mr Andrews as a former Premier being mounted any time soon? It is just a factual update, that is all.

**Shaun LEANE:** Can we take that on notice? I do not know.

**John PESUTTO:** Take it on notice. That is fine. Speaker, I think it was you who provided the answers about the nature of threats. I just want to get a sense – and of course I understand that it is not good policy and not advisable to go into the details, but are you able to provide the committee with any sense of whether the nature of threats, given the polarisation that we are seeing across many areas of public discourse, are becoming more exacerbated? Do you have any concerns about the nature of threats?

**Maree EDWARDS:** Thank you, Member for Hawthorn. Yes, I think that more broadly across every parliamentary democracy in the world there are increasing concerns, and our security team regularly meet with ASIO. Of course, as you would know, the general terrorism threat across Australia is 'probable', which is obviously determined by ASIO. We do take these things into consideration. 'Probable' means a greater than 50 per cent chance of an onshore terrorist attack within the next 12 months. So yes, the risk is very high. They assess our landscape very regularly, in partnership with VicPol and ASIO, for a range of different threats. I think there is a general concern that domestic actors are increasingly problematic, particularly as they are driven to action by, as you mentioned, sociopolitical matters.

**John PESUTTO:** Forgive me, Speaker, further to that comment, is there any suggestion that there are foreign actors who might be fuelling activity in and around the Victorian Parliament or more broadly?

**Maree EDWARDS:** I could not go into detail on that, Member for Hawthorn, but I do think that there is an increased prevalence of language that is particularly related to extremism and narratives that are fuelled by conspiracy theories that are often driven by social media. So yes, I think we have to be mindful all the time of the risk. The other risk obviously is cybersecurity, and like every jurisdiction we are constantly monitoring that risk and like every jurisdiction we are at risk. The Secretary can probably talk more to the measures that we put in place to allay any cybersecurity threats, but it is a problem that is not just here in Victoria. It is across many –

**John PESUTTO:** Without asking you, Speaker or President, to disclose anything that you should not, do the assessments that you receive and the briefings you receive around security give you reason to think that the Parliament may need to invest more to anticipate the changing nature of threats?

**Maree EDWARDS:** I think that it is a constant to be reviewing our security measures; it is not something that is static.

**John PESUTTO:** Yes. Can I ask, on a related subject, about protests on the steps, which we kind of all accept. I think to one degree or another we accept that it is a place where people congregate to express their views, but I think it would be fair to say there has been mounting concern about the nature of some protests in and around the Parliament. Also we have seen in recent times a number of frequent instances where the chambers have been adjourned because they have been disrupted. Are you seeking any advice or proposing any measures to deal with the nature of protest activity, where it goes beyond what we consider to be the lawful and acceptable expression of democratic opinion?

**Shaun LEANE:** Look, I think, John, I would not wish it on any Presiding Officer or a future Presiding Officer to be in a position to decide what sorts of protest are allowed to protest out the front.

**John PESUTTO:** Of course. That is accepted.

**Shaun LEANE:** We have a balance where, as I was saying before about the committee rooms, we want Victorians. This is their place. We want them to come in. We want them to view Parliament. We want them to view committees. It is a balance. With the disruptions to the chambers, that is the balance. There is a great deal of work, there is intelligence and there are all sorts of things we can do, but we do run the risk from time to time that there may be a disruption. We wish there was not, but the alternative is that we close down everything, and that is not what the Parliament can be about.

**John PESUTTO:** President, can I ask just on that: have there been any outcomes from investigations into the invitations that have been extended to people who have entered the Parliament, sat in the galleries and then disrupted either of you, perhaps? Have there been any outcomes? If you cannot disclose details for one reason or another, I accept that, but has that process been concluded?

**Shaun LEANE:** Yes. I will give an example. Most sitting weeks in our chamber we have a debate around a petition, and every sitting week without fail there is a great deal of interest, particularly from the people who signed that petition, around that debate, so we have had our galleries pretty full. And a lot of times those galleries are sponsored by the MP who has actually sponsored the petition. So we put a lot of responsibility back on those MPs to say we want them in here. They are passionate about it; we want them here. I actually say in the chamber, 'We're really happy you are here.' So we put a bit of responsibility back on the sponsor. I think it has worked really well. As I said, this balance where we want Victorians to be in here – this is their house. But the odd person – hopefully not often – is going to play up, which disrupts the whole place.

**John PESUTTO:** Thanks, President. I appreciate that greatly. The Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commissioner, who reports directly to the Parliament: is that something that either or both of you have been involved in assessing the performance of in any way?

**Maree EDWARDS:** No.

**Shaun LEANE:** No.

**John PESUTTO:** The performance statement, page 162, does talk about a parliamentary appropriation of \$3 million. Can I just get you to confirm for the record that neither of your offices nor any of the offices in the Parliament review the performance of that commissioner?

**Shaun LEANE:** No.

**Maree EDWARDS:** No.

**John PESUTTO:** Okay.

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

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair. Secretary, you have been good enough to house me in 55 St Andrews for the past 18 months. It is a good office, but I am on the second floor with no signage and no ability for my constituents to come and visit. I see that you have recently installed some new signage on the outside of the

building highlighting that it is the Parliament. Of course, though, temporary electorate offices are a very small part of it. A considerable number of parliamentary departments do work out of that building, so I would like to know what consultation you undertook with DPS staff ahead of that signage going up, specifically in relation to any safety risks that they may have had?

**Trish BURROWS:** The signage has gone up for wayfinding, really, as we have talked about the committee hearing rooms today and that being really the seat of them. You will also know with the committee hearing rooms we have moved the entrance. It is even further now from the street. It used to be about halfway down, and now it is quite a long way down. The signage piece of the committee hearing rooms was really done focusing on the wayfinding for members of the public and others coming in to it. The design of the signage was pretty – I do not know if low-key is right, but eyesight is quite clear. The entrance at the back is clearly marked for staff and passholders, and you will know there are three gates to go through to get in from that street as well. In setting up the committee hearing rooms, that was all part of that process and doing the work in the hope that it will achieve the outcome for people coming and invited into committee hearing rooms.

**Michael GALEA:** For those guests obviously it makes a lot of sense. But were staff aware that it was going up? Because I have heard from a lot that they were not aware it was even going to be put up, let alone consulted with.

**Trish BURROWS:** I do not know whether – I mean, everyone was aware of the committee hearing rooms and that signage going up, but the actual signage would have just been part of the project itself. I know I reviewed the signage on the way as it was being proposed by the architect, but outside of that group involved in the committee hearing room, I would have to – I am not sure. I would not have thought so.

**Michael GALEA:** Okay. If there is, are you happy to come back to the committee on notice?

**Trish BURROWS:** Yes, of course.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. Lauren, I think you have something.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you. Yes, I just wanted to start my time by pointing out the rank hypocrisy of the Liberal–National members of this committee and the way they are raising security concerns. When we think that they escorted a member of the public to a secure area to put shit outside the office of the Premier, when they film outside our offices and normalise harassment of public figures, when they leave comments from the public on their social media posts and ads calling for extreme sexual violence against Labor MPs, when they edit to mock and dehumanise ministers and public servants even in these very hearings –

**The CHAIR:** Ms Kathage, there is a point of order.

**Richard RIORDAN:** On a point of order, Chair, we are here to discuss the budget, not for Ms Kathage to randomly cite a whole bunch of things that she claims to be true without any evidence. This is not what the hearings are about. The hearings are about her putting questions to the responsible Presiding Officers and others on the running of the Parliament, not on her Saturday night scrolling on Facebook.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Riordan, you might want to reflect on that point of order in light of the last six days of hearings. It is the preamble to her question. Ms Kathage to continue.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you. I think we are all accountable for keeping each other safe as members of Parliament and in the Parliament with our behaviour, so I hope that that higher standard will be observed by others. Some people that we can learn from, I think, are our Pacific partners. It is fantastic that we have twinning arrangements with Tuvalu, Nauru and Fiji. I know it has been a big year for those partnerships, and so I want to ask a little bit about how we feel that is progressing and what some of those meaningful outcomes have been. I am also interested to know what we have learned from them, because it is not a one-way street.

**Shaun LEANE:** Yes, absolutely.

**Maree EDWARDS:** Do you want to start?

**Shaun LEANE:** Yes, sure. The twinning arrangements – I would like to give a big shout-out to the clerks team, particularly Sally West, who leads a lot of this work with Fiji, Nauru and Tuvalu. It has actually been

quite active. I want to thank the members of Parliament that have assisted in this as well. Getting back to your comment, they are relationships that we get as much out of as our twinning partners do. All members that get involved, after any activity they have done, come back and say that. Something recently that I think was quite successful was that Nauru MPs, including the Speaker and the President, came over and reviewed all of their standing orders and modernised them. They had things in there like ‘The Chairman will’ and ‘This man will do that’, so they have modernised the language, the gender and all of that, and they did that here with the great assistance of the clerks. That was when we took the opportunity to name one of those committee rooms. Personally I have found it has been a great learning experience for me as well, seeing how these jurisdictions operate. I think they have come a long way too insofar as where they want to be, and we have really appreciated the opportunity. Maree?

**Maree EDWARDS:** I just would like to put on the record our thanks to the parliamentary staff who work so tirelessly with our three twinning parliaments, because they are the ones that actually help them with many, many aspects of their parliaments, including Kate Murray. I believe the Member for Hawthorn also was at the Bill review seminar in Fiji over the last little while. These things happen because our parliamentary staff work so hard to pull them together, including our clerks, of course, to support these parliaments to be the best they can be, bearing in mind that their budgets are way less than ours. They do really struggle sometimes to deliver great outcomes, but they are very passionate, all three of them, about their democracies, as are we, and we want to make sure that we can continue those twinning relationships.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you, Speaker.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Puglielli.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you, Chair, and – almost – good afternoon. A member of one of my colleague’s staff practises Islam, and it was raised with me that during the holy month of Ramadan they did not have a place in Parliament for prayer and quiet reflection. Everyone here, I think, understands the need for our facilities to support staff and visitors from diverse faith backgrounds, so I was pleased to hear mention of a prayer room just earlier on level 3. Can I ask: is that the pending solution to this issue?

**Maree EDWARDS:** I beg your pardon?

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Is that the solution to this issue? Is that going to be the dedicated space?

**Maree EDWARDS:** I think it is a good start, Aiv. I think it is obviously something that we are very conscious of. As our Parliament starts to diversify well into the future, obviously, when we have people from all sorts of backgrounds as members of Parliament, given our wonderful multicultural state of Victoria, we will have to continue to adapt and introduce measures that support those members of Parliament. It is similar to what we have been doing around disability, which is another aspect of change that we are seeing in our very old, beautiful Parliament, which was never built for people with disability. Of course for our wonderful member, who is going through some very difficult times at the moment, we have had to make some adjustments to support her. Similarly, whoever the Presiding Officers will be after the next election, I think there will be ongoing work done in partnership with the clerks and the Secretary to make sure that the Parliament is inclusive and supportive of everyone, irrespective of their background.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you. The plans for that prayer space for level 3 – is it anticipated that that will be just for staff and MPs or also for members of the public visiting the site?

**Maree EDWARDS:** I think it is for everyone, members of the public as well.

**Shaun LEANE:** Everyone, yes.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Okay. Thank you. We have touched on the certificate of occupancy information that is pending from FRV. Is there an expected timeline for that to turn around? How soon are we talking, even ballpark if you can?

**Maree EDWARDS:** Are we allowed to say?

**Trish BURROWS:** We hope very, very soon.

**Maree EDWARDS:** Very, very soon.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** So this year very, very soon?

**Trish BURROWS:** Yes.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Amazing.

**Maree EDWARDS:** Very, very soon – this week.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Oh, great. It has been said now. I might move on. We have touched on the egress of water and leaks with respect to the annexe. Can I ask: in the past the committee has been told, around rectification of that, that we would need to take the rooftop garden off entirely. Is that still the case?

**Shaun LEANE:** We are taking a less dramatic view. It looks like we can do it in stages. The really important stage is after the last sitting day. I think we have looked at a less dramatic way of remedying it. I do not know, Trish, if you want to add to that.

**Trish BURROWS:** Yes. It is doing the edges, if you like, rather than the whole roof – the edges and the sides in two stages.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Rather than the whole top coming off?

**Shaun LEANE:** Yes. The main issue was the award-winning way that we put the handrail on.

**Richard RIORDAN:** We drilled to the water barrier.

**Maree EDWARDS:** Yes.

**Shaun LEANE:** Very good.

**Richard RIORDAN:** We need the Building and Plumbing Commission.

**Shaun LEANE:** It is probably worse than that because –

**Richard RIORDAN:** Eighty per cent of all faults, the old screw.

**Shaun LEANE:** We also used different types of metal, which you are not supposed to do, which caused an electromatic sort of reaction that has made it rust. It was not the best design, we think –

**Maree EDWARDS:** We know.

**Shaun LEANE:** Yes, we know.

**Maree EDWARDS:** We now know.

**Shaun LEANE:** But yes, the perimeter, so hopefully we can maintain a lot of what we have got in the middle. We will probably be on track to be able to remedy it. As I said, we are not happy, and we are looking at some recourse to see if we can redeem some money to fund it.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Those plans obviously have progressed since we discussed it in previous hearings. Is that finalised, that perimeter being taken off, or is that still something that is evolving over time?

**Trish BURROWS:** I know the engineering design is done, and we will go to market shortly for the constructor.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Okay. Is there anything with respect to cost that you can speak to for this committee?

**Trish BURROWS:** Could I come back to you in relation to that?

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes, totally. Do you anticipate in that process any vegetation will be removed? How much are we retaining?

**Trish BURROWS:** The edges will need to be removed. How far back in – we really need the constructor as well to come and tell us exactly the methodology that they want to do to deploy that engineering solution, but it will not be excavators on the roof taking the whole lot off.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Excellent. For anything that does come off, is it anticipated that things will be put back in? I know that a lot of members and others that come to the site love that garden that is up there. It is beautiful.

**Trish BURROWS:** There is currently no planned design change for the rooftop.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Great. Thank you. A colleague of mine – as I think you would be aware, the Member for Brunswick – his former office was found to be mouldy because of that water ingress, things getting in. It was vacated. Repairs were attempted, I understand. Have those repairs been successful? Is that office now functional? Is it being used?

**Trish BURROWS:** I will have to come back to you. It is not one that I am recalling at the moment.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Okay. That is all right.

**Maree EDWARDS:** Just on that, though –

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Please.

**Maree EDWARDS:** we do have mould detection every month. They go in and they check every space to make sure, and if a member reports it, it is acted on very quickly.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Okay. Thank you. Sort of zooming out a little bit, the capital works planned for over the forward estimates, are there any further timelines or detail that you can provide to the committee around those capital works for the precinct?

**Maree EDWARDS:** I will get the Secretary to speak to that.

**Trish BURROWS:** Certainly the break from your last sitting day to the first full week next year will be really busy onsite. The President has referred to the work on the annexe. In addition, we will be putting in a new range hood in the kitchen, which sounds small when you think about your home, but it is huge in a production kitchen – pulling the whole roof down, putting in a new system. We will also be undertaking some additional works to what you might have seen: the level 2 corridor outside the library has recently been refurbished, as has the Federation Room. We will be doing some more major works along there on the level 1 corridor and also taking the opportunity to refurbish the government party room – that will be a very busy time – as well as some additional works in the annexe.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Okay. Perfect. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Puglielli. Mr Tak.

**Richard RIORDAN:** Will the paintings go back up?

**Trish BURROWS:** Yes, the paintings will go up in the corridor.

**Meng Heang TAK:** Thank you, Chair, Speaker, President and officials. Speaker and President, Queens Hall is one of the most magnificent spaces, as we all agree, in our Parliament, and opening it up to a wider range of community groups and exhibitions is a really meaningful way of making this Parliament feel genuinely accessible to all Victorians. Speaker and President, could you speak to the changes that have been made to the policy around community use of Queens Hall, what drove the change and what kinds of groups and exhibitions you are hoping to attract, including how you see that contributing to the Parliament's broader community engagement goal?

**Shaun LEANE:** When Maree and I a few years ago were looking at the use of Queens Hall, we kind of made a conscious decision to try and go – and MPs have been great at it – approach different groups and different important stakeholders to our state. We found that the really smart stakeholders worked out that you could get into Queens Hall nearly every year if you booked early, which is fantastic and good for them. But we

thought we should be we should be finding a way that it is shared around more. As you can see, it has been really successful as far as different types of groups that have utilised it. There were some initiatives. Maree's initiative around International Women's Day, where she brought in different sporting officials, was just fantastic – something different that we have never had before. We had an approach from the Special Olympics, which a lot of actually, I have got to admit, did not know a lot about. So a number of different groups, like the autism groups that we had in recently. They have all kind of wised up too that it is a great opportunity to have a conversation with just about every MP that represents this Parliament and their staff, and they get a chance to have great conversations with ministers, shadow ministers and other major parties and actually push the good work that they do. It is something that we really like. It is one of the things, one of our ambitions, that we feel has really been successful, so we are really happy.

**Maree EDWARDS:** And many of those people have never been in the Parliament before. To see the looks on their faces when they look up at the ceiling of Queens Hall or just take in the space – I mean, it really is something. We all take it for granted because we work here. But it really is a great way to bring more and more people into our Parliament to experience democracy.

**Shaun LEANE:** Yes. Just another example: we had the Big Issue in I think late last year to promote their annual calendar that they put out. They also do some good work. They had another part of their social enterprise they wanted to support. Speaking to some of their franchisees, on Maree's point, they had never been here before. I spoke to a couple of their franchisees, a couple of women, about how they enjoyed the experience. They said it was fantastic because they met Paul Mercurio, so there you go. But as Maree says, you know, this is the Victorians' Parliament and we had this situation where we felt, 'Let's give more and more people this opportunity,' and we are really happy with it.

**Meng Heang TAK:** Thank you. On that note, President and Speaker, I could not help but just to say how fantastic it is, like my good friend here the Member for Point Cook, to bring along different community groups from our electorates, and we can see that multicultural, multifaith communities really enjoy it.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** If I could ask a question just on Queens Hall actually. Are we able to keep the space around the statue of the queen more available? People love to take photos alongside it. It would be really great if that could be maybe a bit of a preserved space, because we have got some challenges around having photos inside the chamber now.

**Maree EDWARDS:** I think if it is a request, that would be something that we would consider.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Thank you. Sorry to interrupt.

**Meng Heang TAK:** Okay. Thank you. It was kind of my next question.

**Maree EDWARDS:** As opposed to removing the statue of Queen Victoria, I presume you mean that she is going to stay, because she is.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Well, you know my long-held views about Queen Victoria. I am looking forward to more photos with the statue. Thank you.

**Meng Heang TAK:** Okay. Thank you. President and Speaker, to come back to the multicultural and multifaith communities in terms of the outreach program, are there any particular communities or organisations that you are keen to see represented in that space in Queens Hall and perhaps come to Parliament that have not had that opportunity before?

**Shaun LEANE:** Yes. Look, any group at all. You know, they are all important stakeholders in our state. As I said, this is our Parliament. And a shout-out to the members of Parliament too, because once we started trying to push people bringing different types of stakeholders in, they have been fantastic in identifying that. We have got to the point where there is actually quite a demand every sitting week, and we have to make a bit of a decision, but we set a bit of a matrix that, you know: has this group been here before, are they Victorian based and what sort of activity do they do – as in like a charitable activity or something like that. We put a bit of weighting on that, and it is a great position. It is not good that we have to choose one out of four, but it is good that we have got this demand. So we are really keen for the MPs to keep pushing it.

**Maree EDWARDS:** Especially when, you know, it might be a group that has not been in before, and we do look at that. So, you know, if you get, for example, an Indian community that might have been in three or four times, then if there is a new group that wants to come in from a different multicultural background, we go, 'Well, they've never been in before, so perhaps it's time to allow them a chance.'

**Meng Heang TAK:** Thank you. Speaker. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Tak. Speaker, President, Secretary and clerks, thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

I would like to thank all of the ministers and officials who have given evidence to the parliamentary committee over the past seven-odd days, as well as Hansard, the committee secretariat and parliamentary attendants. I would also like to thank the hospitality, security and cleaning staff, who have looked after us tremendously over the last seven days.

This now concludes the public hearing component for the 2026–27 budget estimates inquiry. I declare this hearing adjourned.

**Committee adjourned.**